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SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

October
1993

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interzone

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No 76

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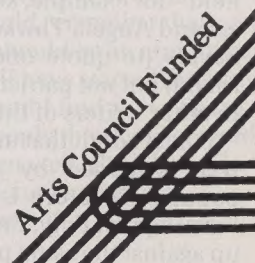
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Interaction

Dear Editors:

The controversy over this year's Arthur Clarke Award has just been brought to my notice, and perhaps a few comments are in order. My memory circuits are now so clogged with gigawords that I find it almost impossible to read fiction. (Stand up the man who said "Or write it either"). I must confess that I've read only one of the winners of the Awards since it was initiated. (I won't say which, but I thoroughly enjoyed it.)

In view of the present controversy, I dipped into the opening chapters of *Body of Glass*, and will say at once that I was very much impressed. If Marge Piercy maintains the same standard throughout the whole book, there's no doubt it is an outstanding work of *science fiction*, by any definition.

May I point out that the judges had an onerous, time-consuming, and in this case, thankless job in reading millions of words to select a winner. I would like to express my gratitude to them for their efforts. Frankly, I can't remember whether I specified that the Award should go to a *British* author, and I'm not sure whether that would be a good thing. I have never been in favour of ethnic cleansing.

Finally, although this may sound rather cynical, it's not a bad idea to have a big *brouhaha* over an award, if it creates awareness of its existence. That has been one of the arguments for the Oscars for decades. If the Award results in a full-blooded controversy that publicizes science fiction, I'll be laughing all the way to my cheque book.

Arthur C. Clarke
Colombo, Sri Lanka

Dear Editors:

I was very sorry to hear about the demise of *MILLION* and do sympathize with your situation. I think on reflection that the kind of people who might be interested in the kind of authors dealt with probably have very definite but limited interests in the field – for example, keen on Ellis Peters and Angela Thirkell and Dorothy Sayers (to quote one example of a friend) but not particularly interested in other writers of this kind.

I must admit that my own interests were widened by the course on popular literature I once taught at Birmingham Poly. I'm afraid you are up against the same pressures which

affect journals on children's literature, about which I know quite a bit. The ones that flourish are the ones produced on a small scale by amateurs and circulated to fellow amateurs – in these days of desk-top publishing it is increasingly easy to produce a fairly professional-looking job at low cost when all the labour of editing etc is done for the love of it and you have a clear target audience whose appetites for comments on Enid Blyton or Elsie J. Oxenham etc are apparently insatiable!

Sheila Ray
Powys, Wales

Dear Editors:

Stephen Gallagher's letter in *MILLION* no. 14 interested me. I cannot add anything on the subject of film novelizations but I can add a footnote to the reference to The Readers' Library. This firm was founded and run by Derwent Hall Caine (1891-1971), younger son of the romantic novelist Hall Caine. He made his first stage appearance at the age of 16 in one of his father's plays, *The Prodigal Son*, a dramatization of the novel of the same name. Not wanting to trade on his father's name he appeared in the programme as "Mr Derwent" but the press soon sussed him out and interviewed him. Incidentally, a novelization of this play was produced by S.R. Squires, titled *The Prodigal Son: A Novelised Version of Mr Hall Caine's Play*, published in 1905 by Bacon & Hudson and surely an oddity of publishing history.

Derwent Hall Caine had a fairly successful career in the theatre and later in silent films – starring in several of the films made from his father's novels but appearing in many others as well and eventually making it into the "talkies," something many actors of the silent era signally failed to do. As well as running The Readers' Library he was the Labour MP for the Everton Division of Liverpool from 1929-1931 and was a staunch supporter of Ramsay MacDonald. He contested the seat as a National Labour candidate in 1931 but lost. He was knighted in 1933 and created a baronet in 1937.

Vivien Allen
Isle of Man

Dear Editors:

The classics are now being thoroughly rewritten for us with novelizations like *Bram Stoker's Dracula*

by Whositwhatsit. What's wrong with promoting the original work, to tie in with the film, or isn't the money going into the right pockets? If the film is different from the original in some way, so what, aren't successful films always different from the novels they're based on? The only film that accurately resembled the novel was *Death in Venice*, which bored the socks off most people. If the novelization of *Bram Stoker's Dracula* is successful I can foresee the following works appearing on Smiths' shelves:

Anthony Trollope's *Barchester Towers* by Leslie Thomas
Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* by Jackie Collins
Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* by Barbara Cartland
Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Tarzan* by Germaine Greer
Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* by Virginia AndrewsTM

I'm sure there will be many more ludicrous titles.

Garry Kilworth
Rochford, Essex

Dear Editors:

Now that the "Horse Meat" fuss seems to have died down a bit, I am left with a question. Why was Paul J. McAuley's "Doctor Luther's Assistant" (*IZ* 68) not greeted with the same kind of opprobrium?

If the fact that nothing appeared in *Interaction* is a true reflection of your mail on the subject, it seems to suggest that the fuss over Brian Aldiss's story can be boiled down to one word only – propriety.

This I find rather depressing. Perhaps I'm wired-up wrong but I found Mr McAuley's witty and brilliant story ten times more disturbing. And if I'm not, where were all those shocked correspondents who cried out in anguish when previously confronted with the arguably loopy image of a virgin being raped in missionary position by a horse?

Does the absence of adverse comment mean that it is perfectly okay to do unspeakable things as a matter of crass routine to semi-sentient servants and playthings? Well, probably not. The lynch-mobs would doubtless be forming at this very minute if Paul J. McAuley were to take similar liberties with the life, comfort and wellbeing of the Andrex puppy or Sonic the Hedgehog.

Sorry, that was flippant – born of a sense of depression, no doubt, having just seen another red herring in the August *Interzone* regarding William Barton's "Slowly Comes a Hungry People."

What I really want to know is why science fiction, the genre of ideas and innovation, is being asked to operate within constraints that have long disappeared from the world of mainstream literary fiction?

In mainstream literary fiction, the unsayable is said, the unprintable is printed as a matter of routine. Fashions will come and go, of course. Books will continue to be written with a high gag-quotient from time to time with an eye on the profits or as a short cut to fame or notoriety. So what? In matters of artistic licence, we all draw the line somewhere – but it's our own line, to protect our own peace of mind and however vehement we may feel, our limits have no relevance for other people.

This may seem too obvious to need saying but half the fun of reading a story is inspecting what we actually receive after it has been filtered through the net of our own beliefs, perceptions and prejudices, surely? For all of us, the words on the page are the same but each person takes that information and sees it differently.

We make of it what we choose. This is our part of the bargain, surely? And if we can't manage it without understanding that the author – dressed as he often is in a third-person narrator's off-stage skin – is just another character too, a character invented to tell the story through (Richard Kerr of Belfast, please note: more reasoned argument, less personal abuse), we may as well give up and reach for a video.

Anne Acaster
Maidstone, Kent

Dear Editors:

If I read another letter about Aldiss's "Horse Meat" my boredom overload circuits will burn out. Suffice to say that the debate has been aired – and that of course was one good reason for writing the story. Can we talk about something else now please? A variety of issues suggest themselves from issue 73.

For example, if Greg Egan is influenced so much by philosophy, he might have thought twice about "Reification Highway." Reified logic is not just speculative, it is, to all intents and purposes, a contradiction in terms. In addition, the development of relevance logic, and the impending demise (aided and abetted by

quantum physics) of classical concepts like the law of the excluded middle, suggest that a less Aristotelian approach might yield more fruit. I seem to recall a certain author by the name of A.E. Van Vogt reaching this conclusion quite some time ago.

Also, the modern use of platonic ideas (interview with Professor Barrow) seems yet to develop as much as it might. On investigating Plato it is difficult to interpret him as positing a mathematical realm reflected only poorly by the physical, or that a full account of the world can be given by either. Rather, we begin to see a hierarchical but unified ontology which passes up from baser things, through the objects of mathematics, and towards the central concept of the Good. This last then becomes the only thing which, for Plato, can ever be regarded as fundamentally real. Often, modern platonism falls a little short of such ideas (now some 2,300 years old) and even Roger Penrose grasps too eagerly for a mathematical ontology.

This is not the only case of ideas being re-invented. Olaf Stapledon's central conjecture in *Star Maker* concerning the Universal Overmind could have been drawn straight from Hegel. Similarly, the idea that brains may be responsible for collapsing the wave function has a striking parallel in the work of Husserl, for whom the world can appear to be a buzzing, booming confusion until it becomes the object of an intelligence. Thus even solutions proposed to the colossal problems posed by quantum physics find an ancestry.

It is high time, therefore, that philosophers and scientists got together more effectively since the middle ground is clearly up for grabs. Sf writers should have a role here, but they need to research the philosophy, as well as the science.

Jon Green
London

Dear Editors:

Having read anthologies of your magazine, obtained from my local library, I tried in vain to buy a copy locally. I didn't really expect to succeed, living in darkest Philistia as I do (Luton, Beds). No science fiction/fantasy/horror on sale anywhere nowadays. I resolved to make the terrifying journey to the land of the tourist-trap and rip-off merchants: London. There I stumbled upon an Aladdin's cave: a real treasure-trove of sf/f/h situated in a deep dungeon beneath Charing Cross Road. Spending my entire pittance in a mad five

seconds, I left, struggling with a heavy bag full of magazines old and new. The journey home was uneventful – apart from almost missing my station, my nose being glued to the August issue of *Interzone*.

Which brings me belatedly and long-windedly to my point. Having to make the effort of writing to send in my subscription I resolved to raise a cry against the technical sloppiness that is now general throughout the genre. I was totally immersed in Robert Holdstock and Garry Kilworth's "The Ragthorn," when SMACK – I was brutally pushed out of the tale by a blatant improbability.

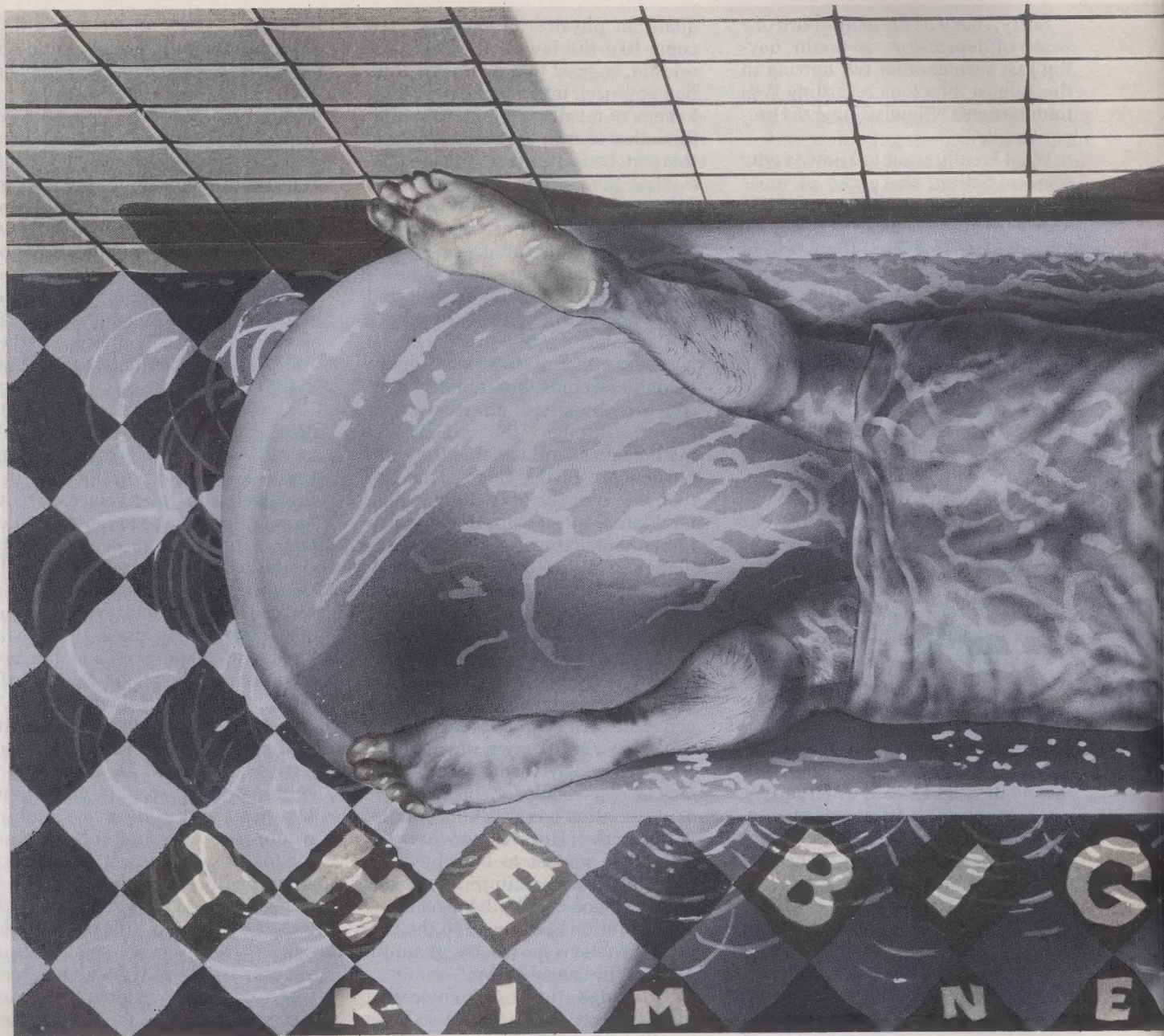
A man had been shot in the last century with an iron ball. Not only would an iron ball be highly damaging to the bore of the firearm, it is high-tech and relatively expensive to manufacture. Lead balls are low-tech: with the aid of a camp fire you could turn out a dozen or so in the time it takes you to sip a cup of herb tea, and they are gentle to the firearm.

Holdstock has done this to me before. In *Mythago Wood* the protagonist refuses a .303 Enfield rifle on the grounds that it weighs 20lb. It actually weighs 9lb loaded, with bayonet. H.M. Government once issued me with an invitation I couldn't refuse, to carry one around for them, and believe me nothing would part me from it if I was heading for any sort of nastiness. (Yes, I am incredibly ancient.)

Elsewhere, Mary Gentle has matchlock muskets with rifle bolts, tinder that is struck against steel. Helium airships – helium is high-tech, hydrogen low-tech – deflated at mooring masts, smashed to bits under their own weight. Elizabeth H. Boyer has Vikings shooting rapids, and popping out like corks: going the wrong way – upstream. Then that silliest of old clichés: a young woman whose arm has been broken by the powerful wing of a bird. A bird's wing is a marvel of construction, but it is flimsy compared to the relative solidity of human bone. There may be more in this novel, but I can't bring myself to pick it up again.

But enough is enough: it is very easy to criticize writers and I really applaud their efforts to entertain. If only they would remember that a reference book should be an arm's reach away. I myself have started the struggle to write and I find it very hard. I envy these people their flow of words and wish them well. But please: let's just be a little more accurate.

Terry Lovesey
Luton, Beds.



The Bay City cops were rousting enemy aliens. As I drove through the nasty coast town, uniforms hauled an old couple out of a grocery store. The Taraki family's neighbours huddled in thin rain howling asthmatically for bloody revenge. Pearl Harbor had struck a lot of people that way. With the Tarakis on the bus for Manzanar, neighbours descended on the store like bedraggled vultures. Produce vanished instantly, then destruction started. Caught at a sleepy stop light, I got a good look. The Tarakis had lived over the store; now, their furniture was thrown out of the second-storey window. Fine china shattered on the sidewalk, spilling white chips into the gutter like teeth. It was inspirational, the forces of democracy rallying round to protect the United States from vicious oriental grocers, fiendishly intent on selling eggplant to a hapless civilian population.

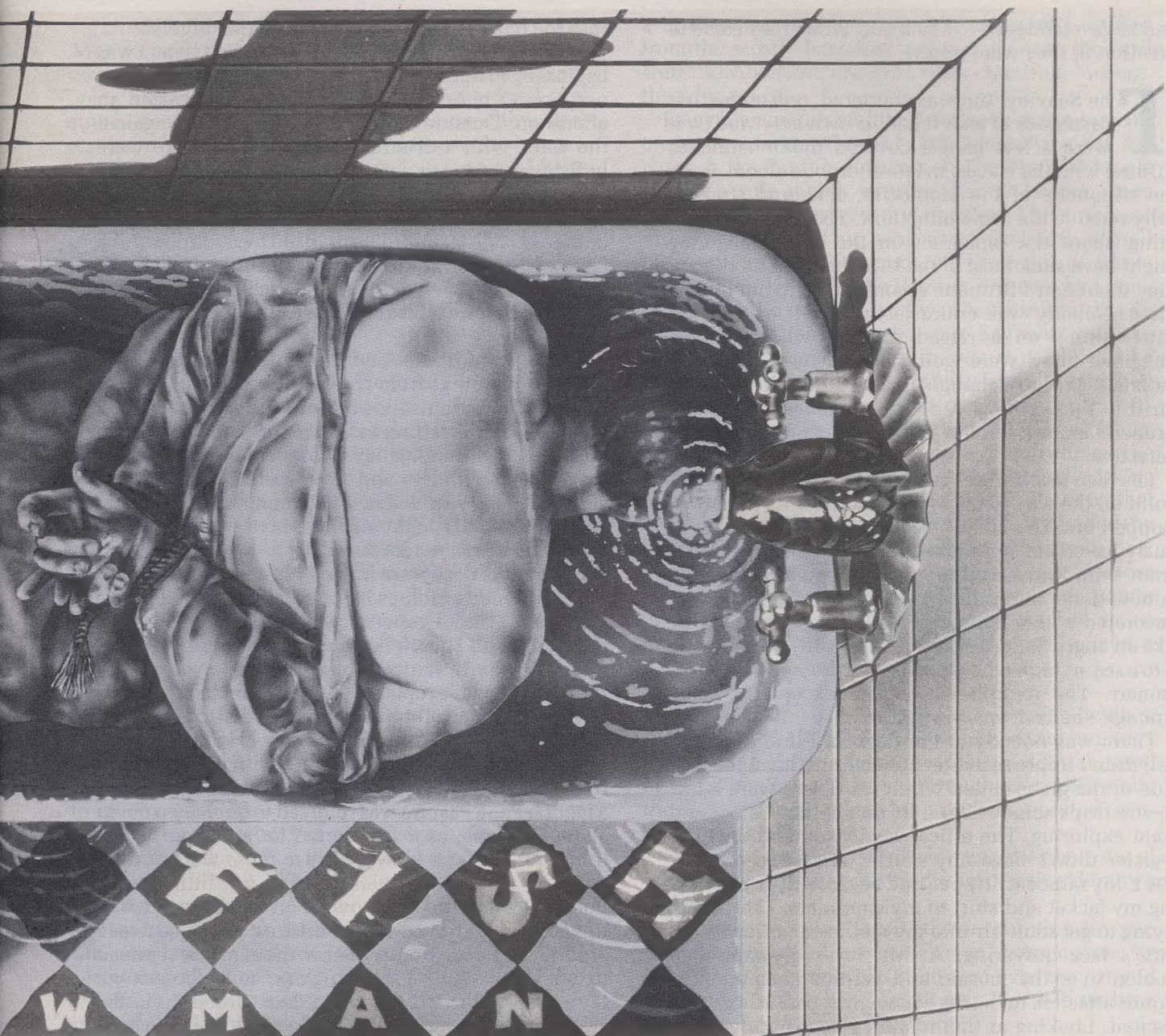
Meanwhile my appointment was with a gent who kept three pictures on his mantelpiece, grouped in a triangle around a statue of the Virgin Mary. At the apex was his white-haired mama, to the left Charles

Luciano, and to the right, Benito Mussolini. The Tarakis, American-born and registered Democrats, were headed to a dustbowl concentration camp for the duration, while Gianni Pastore, Sicilian-born and highly unregistered capo of the Family business, would spend his war in a marble-fronted mansion paid for by nickels and dimes dropped on the numbers game, into slot machines, or exchanged for the favours of nice girls from the old country. I'd seen his mansion before and so far been able to resist the temptation to bean one of his twelve muse statues with a bourbon bottle.

Money can buy you love but can't even put down a deposit on good taste.

The palace was up in the hills, a little way down the boulevard from Tyrone Power. But now, Pastore was hanging his mink-banded fedora in a Bay City beachfront motel complex, which was a real-estate agent's term for a bunch of horrible shacks shoved together for the convenience of people who like sand on their carpets.

I always take a lungful of fresh air before entering a



confined space with someone in Pastore's business, so I parked the Chrysler a few blocks from the Seaview Inn and walked the rest of the way, sucking on a Camel to keep warm in the wet. They say it doesn't rain in Southern California, but they also say the U.S. Navy could never be taken by surprise. This February, three months into a war the rest of the world had been fighting since 1936 or 1939 depending on whether you were Chinese or Polish, it was raining almost constantly, varying between a light fall of misty drizzle in the dreary daytimes to spectacular storms, complete with De Mille lighting effects, in our fear-filled nights. Those trusty Boy Scouts scanning the horizons for Jap subs and Nazi U-boats were filling up influenza wards, and manufacturers of raincoats and umbrellas who'd not yet converted their plants to defence production were making a killing. I didn't mind the rain. At least rainwater is clean, unlike most other things in Bay City.

A small boy with a wooden gun leaped out of a bush and sprayed me with sound effects, interrupting his onomatopoeic chirruping with a shout of "die you

slant-eyed Jap!" I clutched my heart, staggered back, and he finished me off with a quick burst. I died for the Emperor and tipped the kid a dime to go away. If this went on long enough, maybe little Johnny would get a chance to march off and do real killing, then maybe come home in a box or with the shakes or a taste for blood. Meanwhile, especially since someone spotted a Jap submarine off Santa Barbara, California was gearing up for the War Effort. Aside from interning grocers, our best brains were writing songs like "To Be Specific, It's Our Pacific," "So Long Momma, I'm Off to Yokahama," "We're Gonna Slap the Jap Right Off the Map" and "When Those Little Yellow Bellies Meet the Cohens and the Kellys." Zanuck had donated his string of Argentine polo ponies to West Point and got himself measured for a comic-opera Colonel's uniform so he could join the Signal Corps and defeat the Axis by posing for publicity photographs.

I'd tried to join up two days after Pearl Harbor but they kicked me back onto the streets. Too many concussions. Apparently, I get hit on the head too often

and have a tendency to black out. When they came to mention it, they were right.

The Seaview Inn was shuttered, one of the first casualties of war. It had its own jetty, and by it were a few canvas-covered motor launches shifting with the waves. In late afternoon gloom, I saw the silhouette of the *Montecito*, anchored strategically outside the three-mile limit. That was one good thing about the Japanese; on the downside, they might have sunk most of the U.S. fleet, but on the up, they'd put Laird Brunette's gambling ship out of business. Nobody was enthusiastic about losing their shirt-buttons on a rigged roulette wheel if they imagined they were going to be torpedoed any moment. I'd have thought that would add an extra thrill to the whole gay, delirious business of giving Brunette money, but I'm just a poor, 25-dollars-a-day detective.

The Seaview Inn was supposed to be a stopping-off point on the way to the Monty and now its trade was stopped off. The main building was sculpted out of dusty ice cream and looked like a three-storey radiogram with wave-scallop friezes. I pushed through double-doors and entered the lobby. The floor was decorated with a mosaic in which Neptune, looking like an angry Santa Claus in a swimsuit, was sticking it to a sea-nymph who shared a hairdresser with Hedy Lamarr. The nymph was naked except for some strategic shells. It was very artistic.

There was nobody at the desk and thumping the bell didn't improve matters. Water ran down the outside of the green-tinted windows. There were a few steady drips somewhere. I lit up another Camel and went exploring. The office was locked and the desk register didn't have any entries after December 7, 1941. My raincoat dripped and began to dry out, sticking my jacket and shirt to my shoulders. I shrugged, trying to get some air into my clothes. I noticed Neptune's face quivering. A thin layer of water had pooled over the mosaic and various anemone-like fronds attached to the sea god were apparently getting excited. Looking at the nymph, I could understand that. Actually, I realized, only the hair was from Hedy. The face and the body were strictly Janey Wilde.

I go to the movies a lot but I'd missed most of Janey's credits: *She-Strangler of Shanghai*, *Tarzan and the Tiger Girl*, *Perils of Jungle Jillian*. I'd seen her in the newspapers though, often in unnervingly close proximity to Pastore or Brunette. She'd started as an Olympic swimmer, picking up medals in Berlin, then followed Weissmuller and Crabbe to Hollywood. She would never get an Academy Award but her legs were in a lot of cheesecake stills publicizing no particular movie. Air-brushed and made-up like a good-looking corpse, she was a fine commercial for sex. In person she was as bubbly as domestic champagne, though now running to flat. Things were slow in the detecting business, since people were more worried about imminent invasion than missing daughters or misplaced love letters. So when Janey Wilde called on me in my office in the Cahuenga Building and asked me to look up one of her ill-chosen men friends, I checked the pile of old envelopes I use as a desk diary and informed her that I was available to make inquiries

into the current whereabouts of a certain big fish.

Wherever Laird Brunette was, he wasn't here. I was beginning to figure Gianni Pastore, the gambler's partner, wasn't here either. Which meant I'd wasted an afternoon. Outside it rained harder, driving against the walls with a drumlike tattoo. Either there were hailstones mixed in with the water or the Jap air force was hurling fistfuls of pebbles at Bay City to demoralize the population. I don't know why they bothered. All Hirohito had to do was slip a thick envelope to the Bay City cops and the city's finest would hand over the whole community to the Japanese Empire with a ribbon around it and a bow on top.

There were more puddles in the lobby, little streams running from one to the other. I was reminded of the episode of *The Perils of Jungle Jillian* I had seen while tailing a child molester to a Saturday matinee. At the end, Janey Wilde had been caught by the Panther Princess and trapped in a room which slowly filled with water. That room had been a lot smaller than the lobby of the Seaview Inn and the water had come in a lot faster.

Behind the desk were framed photographs of pretty people in pretty clothes having a pretty time. Pastore was there, and Brunette, grinning like tiger cats, mingling with showfolk: Xavier Cugat, Janey Wilde, Charles Coburn. Janice Marsh, the pop-eyed beauty rumoured to have replaced *Jungle Jillian* in Brunette's affections, was well represented in artistic poses.

On the phone, Pastore had promised faithfully to be here. He hadn't wanted to bother with a small-timer like me but Janey Wilde's name opened a door. I had a feeling Papa Pastore was relieved to be shaken down about Brunette, as if he wanted to talk about something. He must be busy, because there were several wars on. The big one overseas and a few little ones at home. Maxie Rothko, bar owner and junior partner in the Monty, had been found drifting in the seaweed around the Santa Monica pier without much of a head to speak of. And Phil Isinglass, man-about-town lawyer and Brunette frontman, had turned up in the storm drains, lungs full of sandy mud. Disappearing was the latest craze in Brunette's organization. That didn't sound good for Janey Wilde, though Pastore had talked about the Laird as if he knew Brunette was alive. But now Papa wasn't around. I was getting annoyed with someone it wasn't sensible to be annoyed with.

Pastore wouldn't be in any of the beach shacks but there should be an apartment for his convenience in the main building. I decided to explore further. *Jungle Jillian* would expect no less. She'd hired me for five days in advance, a good thing since I'm unduly reliant on eating and drinking and other expensive diversions of the monied and idle.

The corridor that led past the office ended in a walk-up staircase. As soon as I put my size nines on the first step, it squelched. I realized something was more than usually wrong. The steps were a quiet little waterfall, seeping rather than cascading. It wasn't just water, there was unpleasant, slimy stuff mixed in. Someone had left the bath running. My first thought was that Pastore had been distracted by a bullet. I was wrong. In the long run, he might have been happier if I'd been right.

I climbed the soggy stairs and found the apartment door unlocked but shut. Bracing myself, I pushed the door in. It encountered resistance but then sliced open, allowing a gush of water to shoot around my ankles, soaking my dark blue socks. Along with water was a three-weeks-dead-in-the-water-with-sewage-and-rotten-fish smell that wrapped around me like a blanket. Holding my breath, I stepped into the room. The waterfall flowed faster now. I heard a faucet running. A radio played, with funny little gurgles mixed in. A crooner was doing his best with "Life is Just a Bowl of Cherries," but he sounded as if he were drowned full fathom five. I followed the music and found the bathroom.

Pastore was face down in the overflowing tub, the song coming from under him. He wore a silk lounging robe that had been pulled away from his back, his wrists tied behind him with the robe's cord. In the end he'd been drowned. But before that hands had been laid on him, either in anger or with cold, professional skill. I'm not a coroner, so I couldn't tell how long the Family Man had been in the water. The radio still playing and the water still running suggested Gianni had met his end recently but the stench felt older than sin.

I have a bad habit of finding bodies in Bay City and the most profit-minded police force in the country have a bad habit of trying to make connections between me and a wide variety of deceased persons. The obvious solution in this case was to make a friendly phone call, absent-mindedly forgetting to mention my name while giving the flatfeet directions to the late Mr Pastore. Who knows, I might accidentally talk to someone honest.

That is exactly what I would have done if, just then, the man with the gun hadn't come through the door...

I had Janey Wilde to blame. She'd arrived without an appointment, having picked me on a recommendation. Oddly, Laird Brunette had once said something not entirely complimentary about me. We'd met. We hadn't seriously tried to kill each other in a while. That was as good a basis for a relationship as any.

Out of her sarong, Jungle Jillian favoured sharp shoulders and a veiled pill-box. The kiddies at the matinee had liked her fine, especially when she was wrestling stuffed snakes, and dutiful Daddies took no exception to her either, especially when she was tied down and her sarong rode up a few inches. Her lips were four red grapes plumped together. When she crossed her legs you saw swimmer's smooth muscle under her hose.

"He's very sweet, really," she explained, meaning Mr Brunette never killed anyone within ten miles of her without apologizing afterwards, "not at all like they say in those dreadful scandal sheets."

The gambler had been strange recently, especially since the war shut him down. Actually the Montecito had been out of commission for nearly a year, supposedly for a refit although as far as Janey Wilde knew no workmen had been sent out to the ship. At about the time Brunette suspended his crooked wheels, he came down with a common California complaint, a dose of crackpot religion. He'd been tangentially mixed up a few years ago with a psychic racket run by

a bird named Amthor, but had apparently shifted from the mostly harmless bunco cults onto the hard stuff. Spiritualism, orgiastic rites, chanting, incense, the whole deal.

Janey blamed this sudden interest in matters occult on Janice Marsh, who had coincidentally made her name as the Panther Princess in *The Perils of Jungle Jillian*, a role which required her to torture Janey Wilde at least once every chapter. My employer didn't mention that her own career had hardly soared between *Jungle Jillian* and *She-Strangler of Shanghai*, while the erstwhile Panther Princess had gone from Republic to Metro and was being built up as an exotic in the Dietrich-Garbo vein. Say what you like about Janice Marsh's Nefertiti, she still looked like Peter Lorre to me. And according to Janey, the star had more peculiar tastes than a seafood buffet.

Brunette had apparently joined a series of fringe organizations and become quite involved, to the extent of neglecting his business and thereby irking his long-time partner, Gianni Pastore. Perhaps that was why person or persons unknown had decided the Laird wouldn't mind if his associates died one by one. I couldn't figure it out. The cults I'd come across mostly stayed in business by selling sex, drugs, power or reassurance to rich, stupid people. The Laird hardly fell into the category. He was too big a fish for that particular bowl.

The man with the gun was English, with a Ronald Colman accent and a white aviator's scarf. He was not alone. The quiet, truck-sized bruiser I made as a fed went through my wallet while the dapper foreigner kept his automatic pointed casually at my middle.

"Peeper," the fed snarled, showing the photostat of my licence and my supposedly impressive deputy's badge.

"Interesting," said the Britisher, slipping his gun into the pocket of his camel coat. Immaculate, he must have been umbrella-protected between car and building because there wasn't a spot of rain on him. "I'm Winthrop. Edwin Winthrop."

We shook hands. His other companion, the interesting one, was going through the deceased's papers. She looked up, smiled with sharp white teeth, and got back to work.

"This is Mademoiselle Dieudonne."

"Genevieve," she said. She pronounced it "Zhe-nyevyev," suggesting Paris, France. She was wearing something white with silver in it and had quantities of pale blonde hair.

"And the gentleman from your Federal Bureau of Investigation is Finlay."

The fed grunted. He looked as if he'd been brought to life by Willis H. O'Brien.

"You are interested in a Mr Brunette," Winthrop said. It was not a question, so there was no point in answering him. "So are we."

"Call in a Russian and we could be the Allies," I said. Winthrop laughed. He was sharp. "True. I am here at the request of my government and working with the full co-operation of yours."

One of the small detective-type details I noticed was that no one even suggested informing the police about Gianni Pastore was a good idea.

"Have you ever heard of a place called Innsmouth, Massachusetts?"

It didn't mean anything to me and I said so.

"Count yourself lucky. Special Agent Finlay's associates were called upon to dynamite certain unsafe structures in the sea off Innsmouth back in the '20s. It was a bad business."

Genevieve said something sharp in French that sounded like swearing. She held up a photograph of Brunette dancing cheek to cheek with Janice Marsh.

"Do you know the lady?" Winthrop asked.

"Only in the movies. Some go for her in a big way but I think she looks like Mr Moto."

"Very true. Does the Esoteric Order of Dagon mean anything to you?"

"Sounds like a Church-of-the-Month alternate. Otherwise, no."

"Captain Obed Marsh?"

"Uh-huh."

"The Deep Ones?"

"Are they those coloured singers?"

"What about Cthulhu, Y'ha-nthlei, R'lyeh?"

"Gesundheit."

Winthrop grinned, sharp moustache pointing. "No, not easy to say at all. Hard to fit into human mouths, you know."

"He's just a bedroom creeper," Finlay said, "he don't know nothing."

"His grammar could be better. Doesn't J. Edgar pay for elocution lessons?"

Finlay's big hands opened and closed as if he were rather there were a throat in them.

"Gene?" Winthrop said.

The woman looked up, red tongue absently flicking across her red lips, and thought a moment. She said something in a foreign language that I did understand.

"There's no need to kill him," she said in French. Thank you very much, I thought.

Winthrop shrugged and said "fine by me." Finlay looked disappointed.

"You're free to go," the Britisher told me. "We shall take care of everything. I see no point in your continuing your current line of inquiry. Send in a chit to this address," he handed me a card, "and you'll be reimbursed for your expenses so far. Don't worry. We'll carry on until this is seen through. By the way, you might care not to discuss with anyone what you've seen here or anything I may have said. There's a War on, you know. Loose lips sink ships."

I had a few clever answers but I swallowed them and left. Anyone who thought there was no need to kill me was all right in my book and I wasn't using my razored tongue on them. As I walked to the Chrysler, several ostentatiously unofficial cars cruised past me, headed for the Seaview Inn.

It was getting dark and lighting was striking down out at sea. A flash lit up the Montecito and I counted five seconds before the thunder boomed. I had the feeling there was something out there beyond the three-mile limit besides the floating former casino, and that it was angry.

I slipped into the Chrysler and drove away from Bay City, feeling better the further inland I got.

I take *Black Mask*. It's a long time since Hammett and the fellow who wrote the Ted Carmady stories were in it, but you occasionally get a good Cornell Woolrich or Erle Stanley Gardner. Back at my office, I saw the newsboy had been by and dropped off the *Times* and next month's pulp. But there'd been a mix-up. Instead of the *Mask*, there was something inside the folded newspaper called *Weird Tales*. On the cover, a man was being attacked by two green demons and a stereotype vampire with a widow's peak. "'Hell on Earth,' a Novelette of Satan in a Tuxedo by Robert Bloch" was blazed above the title. Also promised were "A new Lovecraft series, 'Herbert West—Re-Animator'" and "'The Rat Master' by Greya la Spina." All for 15 cents, kids. If I were a different type of detective, the brand who said *nom de* something and waxed a moustache whenever he found a mutilated corpse, I might have thought the substitution an omen.

In my office, I've always had five filing cabinets, three empty. I also had two bottles, only one empty. In a few hours, the situation would have changed by one bottle.

I found a glass without too much dust and wiped it with my clean handkerchief. I poured myself a generous slug and hit the back of my throat with it.

The radio didn't work but I could hear Glenn Miller from somewhere. I found my glass empty and dealt with that. Sitting behind my desk, I looked at the patterns in rain on the window. If I craned I could see traffic on Hollywood Boulevard. People who didn't spend their working days finding bodies in bathtubs were going home not to spend their evenings emptying a bottle.

After a day, I'd had some excitement but I hadn't done much for Janey Wilde. I was no nearer being able to explain the absence of Mr Brunette from his usual haunts than I had been when she left my office, leaving behind a tantalizing whiff of essence de chine.

She'd given me some literature pertaining to Brunette's cult involvement. Now, the third slug warming me up inside, I looked over it, waiting for inspiration to strike. Interesting echoes came up in relation to Winthrop's shopping list of subjects of peculiar interest. I had no luck with the alphabet-soup syllables he'd spat at me, mainly because "Cthulhu" sounds more like a cough than a word. But the Esoteric Order of Dagon was a group Brunette had joined, and Innsmouth, Massachusetts, was the East Coast town where the organization was registered. The Esoteric Order had a temple on the beach front in Venice, and its mumbo-jumbo hand-outs promised "ancient and intriguing rites to probe the mysteries of the Deep." Slipped in with the recruitment bills was a studio biography of Janice Marsh, which helpfully revealed the movie star's place of birth as Innsmouth, Massachusetts, and that she could trace her family back to Captain Obed Marsh, the famous early-19th-century explorer of whom I'd never heard. Obviously Winthrop, Genevieve and the FBI were well ahead of me in making connections. And I didn't really know who the Englishman and the French girl were.

I wondered if I wouldn't have been better off reading *Weird Tales*. I liked the sound of Satan in a Tuxedo. It wasn't Ted Carmady with an automatic and a dame, but it would do. There was a lot more

thunder and lightning and I finished the bottle. I suppose I could have gone home to sleep but the chair was no more uncomfortable than my Murphy bed.

The empty bottle rolled and I settled down, tie loose, to forget the cares of the day.

Thanks to the War, Pastore only made page 3 of the Times. Apparently the noted gambler-entrepreneur had been shot to death. If that was true, it had happened after I'd left. Then, he'd only been tortured and drowned. Police Chief John Wax dished out his usual "over by Christmas" quote about the investigation. There was no mention of the FBI, or of our allies, John Bull in a tux and Mademoiselle la Guillotine. In prison, you get papers with neat oblongs cut out to remove articles the censor feels provocative. They don't make any difference: all newspapers have invisible oblongs. Pastore's sterling work with underprivileged kids was mentioned but someone forgot to write about the junk he sold them when they grew into underprivileged adults. The obit photograph found him with Janey Wilde and Janice Marsh at the premiere of a George Raft movie. The phantom Jap sub off Santa Barbara got more column inches. General John L. DeWitt, head of the Western Defence Command, called for more troops to guard the coastline, prophesying "death and destruction are likely to come at any moment." Everyone in California was looking out to sea.

After my regular morning conference with Mr Huggins and Mr Young, I placed a call to Janey Wilde's Malibu residence. Most screen idols are either at the studio or asleep if you telephone before ten o'clock in the morning, but Janey, with weeks to go before shooting started on *Bowery to Bataan*, was at home and awake, having done her 30 lengths. Unlike almost everyone else in the industry, she thought a swimming pool was for swimming in rather than lounging beside.

She remembered instantly who I was and asked for news. I gave her a precis.

"I've been politely asked to refrain from further investigations," I explained. "By some heavy hitters." "So you're quitting?"

I should have said yes, but "Miss Wilde, only you can require me to quit. I thought you should know how the federal government feels."

There was a pause.

"There's something I didn't tell you," she told me. It was an expression common among my clients. "Something important."

I let dead air hang on the line.

"It's not so much Laird that I'm concerned about. It's that he has Franklin."

"Franklin?"

"The baby," she said. "Our baby. My baby."

"Laird Brunette has disappeared, taking a baby with him?"

"Yes."

"Kidnapping is a crime. You might consider calling the cops."

"A lot of things are crimes. Laird has done many of them and never spent a day in prison."

That was true, which was why this development was strange. Kidnapping, whether personal or for

profit, is the riskiest of crimes. As a rule, it's the province only of the stupidest criminals. Laird Brunette was not a stupid criminal.

"I can't afford bad publicity. Not when I'm so near to the roles I need."

Bowery to Bataan was going to put her among the screen immortals.

"Franklin is supposed to be Esther's boy. In a few years, I'll adopt him legally. Esther is my housekeeper. It'll work out. But I must have him back."

"Laird is the father. He will have some rights."

"He said he wasn't interested. He...um, moved on...to Janice Marsh while I was...before Franklin was born."

"He's had a sudden attack of fatherhood and you're not convinced?"

"I'm worried to distraction. It's not Laird, it's her. Janice Marsh wants my baby for something vile. I want you to get Franklin back."

"As I mentioned, kidnapping is a crime."

"If there's a danger to the child, surely..."

"Do you have any proof that there is danger?"

"Well, no."

"Have Laird Brunette or Janice Marsh ever given you reason to believe they have ill-will for the baby?"

"Not exactly."

I considered things.

"I'll continue with the job you hired me for, but you understand that's all I can do. If I find Brunette, I'll pass your worries on. Then it's between the two of you."

She thanked me in a flood and I got off the phone feeling I'd taken a couple of strides further into the LaBrea tar pits and could feel sucking stickiness well above my knees.

I should have stayed out of the rain and concentrated on chess problems but I had another four days' worth of Jungle Jillian's retainer in my pocket and an address for the Esoteric Order of Dagon in a clipping from a lunatic scientific journal. So I drove out to Venice, reminding myself all the way that my wipers needed fixing.

Venice, California, is a fascinating idea that didn't work. Someone named Abbot Kinney had the notion of artificially creating a city like Venice, Italy, with canals and architecture. The canals mostly ran dry and the architecture never really caught on in a town where, in the '20s, Gloria Swanson's bathroom was considered an aesthetic triumph. All that was left was the beach and piles of rotting fish. Venice, Italy, is the Plague Capital of Europe, so Venice, California, got one thing right.

The Esoteric Order was up the coast from Muscle Beach, housed in a discreet yacht-club building with its own small marina. From the exterior, I guessed the cult business had seen better days. Seaweed had tracked up the beach, swarmed around the jetty, and was licking the lower edges of the front wall. Everything had gone green: wood, plaster, copper ornaments. And it smelled like Pastore's bathroom, only worse. This kind of place made you wonder why the Japs were so keen on invading.

I looked at myself in the mirror and rolled my eyes. I tried to get that slap-happy, let-me-give-you-all-my-worldly-goods, gimme-some-mysteries-of-the-orient

look I imagined typical of a communicant at one of these bughouse congregations. After I'd stopped laughing, I remembered the marks on Pastore and tried to take detecting seriously. Taking in my unshaven, slept-upright-in-his-clothes, two-bottles-a-day lost soul look, I congratulated myself on my foresight in spending 15 years developing the ideal cover for a job like this.

To get in the building, I had to go down to the marina and come at it from the beach-side. There were green pillars of what looked like fungus-eaten cardboard either side of the impressive front door, which held a stained-glass picture in shades of green and blue of a man with the head of a squid in a natty monk's number, waving his eyes for the artist. Dagon, I happened to know, was half-man, half-fish, and God of the Philistines. In this town, I guess a Philistine God blended in well. It's a great country: if you're half-fish, pay most of your taxes, eat babies and aren't Japanese, you have a wonderful future.

I rapped on the squid's head but nothing happened. I looked the squid in several of his eyes and felt squirmy inside. Somehow, up close, cephalopod-face didn't look that silly.

I pushed the door and found myself in a temple's waiting room. It was what I'd expected: subdued lighting, old but bad paintings, a few semi-pornographic statuettes, a strong smell of last night's incense to cover up the fish stink. It had as much religious atmosphere as a two-dollar bordello.

"Yoo-hoo," I said, "Dagon calling..."

My voice sounded less funny echoed back at me.

I prowled, sniffing for clues. I tried saying *nom de* something and twiddling a non-existent moustache but nothing came to me. Perhaps I ought to switch to a meerschaum of cocaine and a deerstalker, or maybe a monocle and an interest in incunabula.

Where you'd expect a portrait of George Washington or Jean Harlow's Mother, the Order had hung up an impressively ugly picture of "Our Founder." Capt. Obed Marsh, dressed up like Admiral Butler, stood on the shore of a Polynesian paradise, his good ship painted with no sense of perspective on the horizon as if it were about three feet tall. The Capt., surrounded by adoring if funny-faced native tomatoes, looked about as unhappy as Errol Flynn at a Girl Scout meeting. The painter had taken a lot of trouble with the native nudes. One of the dusky lovelies had hips that would make Lombard green and a face that put me in mind of Janice Marsh. She was probably the Panther Princess's great-great-great grandmother. In the background, just in front of the ship, was something like a squid emerging from the sea. Fumble-fingers with a brush had tripped up again. It looked as if the tentacle-waving creature were about twice the size of Obed's clipper. The most upsetting detail was a robed and masked figure standing on the deck with a baby's ankle in each fist. He had apparently just wrenched the child apart like a wishbone and was emptying blood into the squid's eyes.

"Excuse me," gargled a voice, "can I help you?"

I turned around and got a noseful of the stooped and ancient Guardian of the Cult. His robe matched the ones worn by squid-features on the door

and baby-ripper in the portrait. He kept his face shadowed, his voice sounded about as good as the radio in Pastore's bath and his breath smelled worse than Pastore after a week and a half of putrefaction.

"Good morning," I said, letting a bird flutter in the higher ranges of my voice, "my name is, er..."

I put together the first things that came to mind.

"My name is Herbert West Lovecraft. Uh, H.W. Lovecraft the Third. I'm simply fascinated by matters Ancient and Esoteric, don't ch'know."

"Don't ch'know" I picked up from the fellow with the monocle and the old books.

"You wouldn't happen to have an entry blank, would you? Or any incunabula?"

"Incunabula?" He wheezed.

"Books. Old books. Print books, published before 1500 *anno domini*, old sport." See, I have a dictionary too.

"Books..."

The man was a monotonous conversationalist. He also moved like Laughton in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and the front of his robe, where the squidhead was embroidered, was wet with what I was disgusted to deduce was drool.

"Old books. Arcane mysteries, don't ch'know. Anything cyclopaean and doom-haunted is just up my old alley."

"The *Necronomicon*?" He pronounced it with great respect, and great difficulty.

"Sounds just the ticket."

Quasimodo shook his head under his hood and it lolled. I glimpsed greenish skin and large, moist eyes.

"I was recommended to come here by an old pal," I said. "Spiffing fellow. Laird Brunette. Ever hear of him?"

I'd pushed the wrong button. Quasi straightened out and grew about two feet. Those moist eyes flashed like razors.

"You'll have to see the Cap'n's Daughter."

I didn't like the sound of that and stepped backwards, towards the door. Quasi laid a hand on my shoulder and held it fast. He was wearing mittens and I felt he had too many fingers inside them. His grip was like a gila monster's jaw.

"That will be fine," I said, dropping the flutter.

As if arranged, curtains parted, and I was shoved through a door. Cracking my head on the low lintel, I could see why Quasi spent most of his time hunched over. I had to bend at the neck and knees to go down the corridor. The exterior might be rotten old wood but the heart of the place was solid stone. The walls were damp, bare and covered in suggestive carvings that gave primitive art a bad name. You'd have thought I'd be getting used to the smell by now, but nothing doing. I nearly gagged.

Quasi pushed me through another door. I was in a meeting room no larger than Union Station, with a stage, rows of comfortable armchairs and lots more squid-person statues. The centrepiece was very like the mosaic at the Seaview Inn, only the nymph had less shells and Neptune more tentacles.

Quasi vanished, slamming the door behind him. I strolled over to the stage and looked at a huge book perched on a straining lectern. The fellow with the monocle would have

salivated, because this looked a lot older than 1500. It wasn't a Bible and didn't smell healthy. It was open to an illustration of something with tentacles and slime, facing a page written in several deservedly dead languages.

"The Necronomicon," said a throaty female voice, "of the mad Arab, Abdul Al-Hazred."

"Mad, huh?" I turned to the speaker. "Is he not getting his royalties?"

I recognized Janice Marsh straight away. The Panther Princess wore a turban and green silk lounging pyjamas, with a floorlength housecoat that cost more than I make in a year. She had on jade earrings, a pearl cluster pendant and a ruby-eyed silver squid brooch. The lighting made her face look green and her round eyes shone. She still looked like Peter Lorre, but maybe if Lorre put his face on a body like Janice Marsh's, he'd be up for sex-goddess roles too. Her silk thighs purred against each other as she walked down the temple aisle.

"Mr Lovecraft, isn't it?"

"Call me H.W. Everyone does."

"Have I heard of you?"

"I doubt it."

She was close now. A tall girl, she could look me in the eye. I had the feeling the eye-jewel in her turban was looking me in the brain. She let her fingers fall on the tentacle picture for a moment, allowed them to play around like a fun-loving spider, then removed them to my upper arm, delicately tugging me away from the book. I wasn't unhappy about that. Maybe I'm allergic to incunabula or perhaps an undiscovered prejudice against tentacled creatures, but I didn't like being near the Necronomicon one bit. Certainly the experience didn't compare with being near Janice Marsh.

"You're the Cap'n's Daughter?" I said.

"It's an honorific title. Obed Marsh was my ancestor. In the Esoteric Order, there is always a Cap'n's Daughter. Right now, I am she."

"What exactly is this Dagon business about?"

She smiled, showing a row of little pearls. "It's an alternative form of worship. It's not a racket, honestly."

"I never said it was."

She shrugged. "Many people get the wrong idea."

Outside, the wind was rising, driving rain against the Temple. The sound effects were weird, like sickening whales calling out in the Bay.

"You were asking about Laird? Did Miss Wilde send you?"

It was my turn to shrug.

"Janey is what they call a sore loser, Mr Lovecraft. It comes from taking all those bronze medals. Never the gold."

"I don't think she wants him back," I said, "just to know where he is. He seems to have disappeared."

"He's often out of town on business. He likes to be mysterious. I'm sure you understand."

My eyes kept going to the squid-face brooch. As Janice Marsh breathed, it rose and fell and rubies winked at me.

"It's Polynesian," she said, tapping the brooch. "The Cap'n brought it back with him to Innsmouth."

"Ah yes, your home town."

"It's just a place by the sea. Like Los Angeles."



I decided to go fishing, and hooked up some of the bait Winthrop had given me. "Were you there when J. Edgar Hoover staged his fireworks display in the '20s?"

"Yes, I was a child. Something to do with rum-runners, I think. That was during Prohibition."

"Good years for the Laird."

"I suppose so. He's legitimate these days."

"Yes. Although if he were as Scotch as he likes to pretend he is, you can be sure he'd have been deported by now."

Janice Marsh's eyes were sea-green. Round or not, they were fascinating. "Let me put your mind at rest, Mr Lovecraft or whatever your name is," she said. "The Esoteric Order of Dagon was never a front for bootlegging. In fact it has never been a front for anything. It is not a racket for duping rich widows out of inheritances. It is not an excuse for motion-picture executives to gain carnal knowledge of teenage drug addicts. It is exactly what it claims to be, a church."

"Father, Son and Holy Squid, eh?"

"I did not say we were a Christian church."

Janice Marsh had been creeping up on me and was close enough to bite. Her active hands went to the back of my neck and angled my head down like an adjustable lamp. She put her lips on mine and squashed her face into me. I tasted lipstick, salt and caviar. Her fingers writhed up into my hair and pushed my hat off. She shut her eyes. After an hour or two of suffering in the line of duty, I put my hands on her hips and detached her body from mine. I had a fish taste in my mouth.

"That was interesting," I said.

"An experiment," she replied. "Your name has such a ring to it. Love...craft. It suggests expertise in a certain direction."

"Disappointed?"

She smiled. I wondered if she had several rows of teeth, like a shark.

"Anything but."

"So do I get an invite to the back-row during your next Dagon hoe-down?"

She was businesslike again. "I think you'd better report back to Janey. Tell her I'll have Laird call her when he's in town and put her mind at rest. She should pay you off. What with the War, it's a waste of manpower to have you spend your time looking for someone who isn't missing when you could be defending Lockheed from Fifth Columnists."

"What about Franklin?"

"Franklin the President?"

"Franklin the baby."

Her round eyes tried to widen. She was playing this scene innocent. The Panther Princess had been the same when telling the white hunter that Jungle Jillian had left the Tomb of the Jaguar hours ago.

"Miss Wilde seems to think Laird has borrowed a child of hers that she carelessly left in his care. She'd like Franklin back."

"Janey hasn't got a baby. She can't have babies. It's why she's such a psycho-neurotic case. Her analyst is getting rich on her bewildering fantasies. She can't tell reality from the movies. She once accused me of human sacrifice."

"Sounds like a square rap."

"That was in a film, Mr Lovecraft. Cardboard knives and catsup blood."

Usually at this stage in an investigation, I call my friend Bernie at the District Attorney's office and put out a few fishing lines. This time, he phoned me. When I got into my office, I had the feeling my telephone had been ringing for a long time.

"Don't make waves," Bernie said.

"Pardon," I snapped back, with my usual lightning-fast wit.

"Just don't. It's too cold to go for a swim this time of year."

"Even in a bathtub."

"Especially in a bathtub."

"Does Mr District Attorney send his regards?"

Bernie laughed. I had been an investigator with the DA's office a few years back, but we'd been forced to part company.

"Forget him. I have some more impressive names on my list."

"Let me guess. Howard Hughes?"

"Close."

"General Stillwell?"

"Getting warmer. Try Mayor Fletcher Bowron, Governor Culbert Olson, and State Attorney General Earl Warren. Oh, and Wax, of course."

I whistled. "All interested in little me. Who'd 'a thunk it?"

"Look, I don't know much about this myself. They just gave me a message to pass on. In the building, they apparently think of me as your keeper."

"Do a British gentleman, a French lady and a fed the size of Mount Rushmore have anything to do with this?"

"I'll take the money I've won so far and you can pass that question on to the next sucker."

"Fine, Bernie. Tell me, just how popular am I?"

"Tojo rates worse than you, and maybe Judas Iscariot."

"Feels comfy. Any idea where Laird Brunette is these days?"

I heard a pause and some rumbling. Bernie was making sure his office was empty of all ears. I imagined him bringing the receiver up close and dropping his voice to a whisper.

"No one's seen him in three months. Confidentially, I don't miss him at all. But there are others..." Bernie coughed, a door opened, and he started talking normally or louder. "...of course, honey, I'll be home in time for Jack Benny."

"See you later, sweetheart," I said, "your dinner is in the sink and I'm off to Tijuana with a professional pool player."

"Love you," he said, and hung up.

I'd picked up a coating of green slime on the soles of my shoes. I tried scraping them off on the edge of the desk and then used yesterday's *Times* to get the stuff off the desk. The gloop looked damned esoteric to me.

I poured myself a shot from the bottle I had picked up across the street and washed the taste of Janice Marsh off my teeth.

I thought of Polynesia in the early 19th century and of those fish-eyed native girls clustering around Capt. Marsh. Somehow, tentacles kept getting in the way of my thoughts. In theory, the Capt. should have been an ideal subject for a Dorothy Lamour movie, perhaps with Janice Marsh in the role of her great-great-great

and Jon Hall or Ray Milland as girl-chasing Obed. But I was picking up Bela Lugosi vibrations from the set-up. I couldn't help but think of bisected babies.

So far none of this running around had got me any closer to the Laird and his heir. In my mind, I drew up a list of Brunette's known associates. Then, I mentally crossed off all the ones who were dead. That brought me up short. When people in Brunette's business die, nobody really takes much notice except maybe to join in a few drunken choruses of "Ding-Dong, the Wicked Witch is Dead" before remembering there are plenty of other Wicked Witches in the sea. I'm just like everybody else: I don't keep a score of dead gambler-entrepreneurs. But, thinking of it, there'd been an awful lot recently, up to and including Gianni Pastore. Apart from Rothko and Isinglass, there'd been at least three other closed-casket funerals in the profession. Obviously you couldn't blame that on the Japs. I wondered how many of the casualties had met their ends in bathtubs. The whole thing kept coming back to water. I decided I hated the stuff and swore not to let my bourbon get polluted with it.

Back out in the rain, I started hitting the bars. Brunette had a lot of friends. Maybe someone would know something.

By early evening, I'd propped up a succession of bars and leaned on a succession of losers. The only thing I'd come up with was the blatantly obvious information that everyone in town was scared. Most were wet, but all were scared.

Everyone was scared of two or three things at once. The Japs were high on everyone's list. You'd be surprised to discover the number of shaky citizens who'd turned overnight from chisellers who'd barely recognize the flag into true red, white and blue patriots prepared to shed their last drop of alcoholic blood for their country. Everywhere you went, someone sounded off against Hirohito, Tojo, the Mikado, kabuki and origami. The current rash of accidental deaths in the Pastore-Brunette circle were a much less popular subject for discussion and tended to turn loudmouths into closemouths at the drop of a question.

"Something fishy," everyone said, before changing the subject.

I was beginning to wonder whether Janey Wilde wouldn't have done better spending her money on a radio commercial asking the Laird to give her a call. Then I found Curtis the Croupier in Maxie's. He usually wore the full soup and fish, as if borrowed from Astaire. Now he'd exchanged his carnation, starched shirtfront and pop-up top hat for an outfit in olive drab with bars on the shoulder and a cap under one epaulette.

"Heard the bugle call, Curtis?" I asked, pushing through a crowd of patriotic admirers who had been buying the soldier boy drinks.

Curtis grinned before he recognized me, then produced a supercilious sneer. We'd met before, on the Montecito. There was a rumour going around that during Prohibition he'd once got involved in an honest card game, but if pressed he'd energetically refute it.

"Hey cheapie," he said.

I bought myself a drink but didn't offer him one. He

had three or four lined up.

"This racket must pay," I said. "How much did the uniform cost? You rent it from Paramount?"

The croupier was offended. "It's real," he said. "I've enlisted. I hope to be sent overseas."

"Yeah, we ought to parachute you into Tokyo to introduce loaded dice and rickety roulette wheels."

"You're cynical, cheapie." He tossed back a drink.

"No, just a realist. How come you quit the Monty?"

"Poking around in the Laird's business?"

I raised my shoulders and dropped them again.

"Gambling has fallen off recently, along with leading figures in the industry. The original owner of this place, for instance. I bet paying for wreaths has thinned your bankroll."

Curtis took two more drinks, quickly, and called for more. When I'd come in, there'd been a couple of chippies climbing into his hip pockets. Now he was on his own with me. He didn't appreciate the change of scenery and I can't say I blamed him.

"Look cheapie," he said, his voice suddenly low, "for your own good, just drop it. There are more important things now."

"Like democracy?"

"You can call it that."

"How far overseas do you want to be sent, Curtis?"

He looked at the door as if expecting five guys with tommy guns to come out of the rain for him. Then he gripped the bar to stop his hands shaking.

"As far as I can get, cheapie. The Philippines, Europe, Australia. I don't care."

"Going to war is a hell of a way to escape."

"Isn't it just? But wouldn't Papa Gianni have been safer on Wake Island than in the tub?"

"You heard the bathtime story, then?"

Curtis nodded and took another gulp. The juke box played "Doodly-Acky-Sacky, Want Some Seafood, Mama" and it was scary. Nonsense, but scary.

"They all die in water. That's what I've heard. Sometimes, on the Monty, Laird would go up on deck and just look at the sea for hours. He was crazy, since he took up with that Marsh popsicle."

"The Panther Princess?"

"You saw that one? Yeah, Janice Marsh. Pretty girl if you like clams. Laird claimed there was a sunken town in the bay. He used a lot of weird words, darkie bop or something. Jitterbug stuff. Cthul-whatever, Yog-Gimme-a-Break. He said things were going to come out of the water and sweep over the land, and he didn't mean U-boats."

Curtis was uncomfortable in his uniform. There were dark patches where the rain had soaked. He'd been drinking like W.C. Fields on a bender but he wasn't getting tight. Whatever was troubling him was too much even for Jack Daniel's.

I thought of the Laird of the Monty. And I thought of the painting of Capt. Marsh's clipper, with that out-of-proportion squid surfacing near it.

"He's on the boat, isn't he?"

Curtis didn't say anything.

"Alone," I thought aloud. "He's out there alone."

I pushed my hat to the back of my head and tried to shake booze out of my mind. It was crazy. Nobody bobs up and down in the water with a sign round their neck saying "Hey Tojo, Torpedo Me!" The Monty was a floating target.

"No," Curtis said, grabbing my arm, jarring drink out of my glass.

"He's not out there?"

He shook his head. "No, cheapie. He's not out there alone."

All the water taxis were in dock, securely moored and covered until the storms settled. I'd never find a boatman to take me out to the *Montecito* tonight. Why, everyone knew the waters were infested with Japanese subs. But I knew someone who wouldn't care any more whether or not his boats were being treated properly. He was even past bothering if they were borrowed without his permission.

The Seaview Inn was still deserted, although there were police notices warning people away from the scene of the crime. It was dark, cold and wet, and nobody bothered me as I broke into the boathouse to find a ring of keys.

I took my pick of the taxis moored to the Seaview's jetty and gassed her up for a short voyage. I also got my .38 Colt Super Match out from the glove compartment of the Chrysler and slung it under my armpit. During all this, I got a thorough soaking and picked up the beginnings of influenza. I hoped Jungle Jillian would appreciate the effort.

The sea was swelling under the launch and making a lot of noise. I was grateful for the noise when it came to shooting the padlock off the mooring chain but the swell soon had my stomach sloshing about in my lower abdomen. I am not an especially competent seaman.

The Monty was out there on the horizon, still visible whenever the lightning lanced. It was hardly difficult to keep the small boat aimed at the bigger one.

Getting out on the water makes you feel small. Especially when the lights of Bay City are just a scatter in the dark behind you. I got the impression of large things moving just beyond my field of perception. The chill soaked through my clothes. My hat was a felt sponge, dripping down my neck. As the launch cut towards the Monty, rain and spray needled my face. I saw my hands white and bath-wrinkled on the wheel and wished I'd brought a bottle. Come to that, I wished I was at home in bed with a mug of cocoa and Claudette Colbert. Some things in life don't turn out the way you plan.

Three miles out, I felt the law change in my stomach. Gambling was legal and I emptied my belly over the side into the water. I stared at the remains of my toasted cheese sandwich as they floated off. I thought I saw the moon reflected greenly in the depths, but there was no moon that night.

I killed the engine and let waves wash the taxi against the side of the Monty. The small boat scraped along the hull of the gambling ship and I caught hold of a weed-furred rope ladder as it passed. I tethered the taxi and took a deep breath.

The ship sat low in the water, as if its lower cabins were flooded. Too much seaweed climbed up towards the decks. It'd never reopen for business, even if the War were over tomorrow.

I climbed the ladder, fighting the water-weight in my clothes, and heaved myself up on deck. It was good to have something more solid than a tiny boat

under me but the deck pitched like an airplane wing. I grabbed a rail and hoped my internal organs would arrange themselves back into their familiar grouping.

"Brunette," I shouted, my voice lost in the wind.

There was nothing. I'd have to go belowdecks.

A sheet flying flags of all nations had come loose, and was whipped around with the storm. Japan, Italy and Germany were still tactlessly represented, along with several European states that weren't really nations any more. The deck was covered in familiar slime.

I made my way around towards the ballroom doors. They'd blown in and rain splattered against the polished wood floors. I got inside and pulled the .38. It felt better in my hand than digging into my ribs.

Lightning struck nearby and I got a flash image of the abandoned ballroom, orchestra stands at one end painted with the name of a disbanded combo.

The casino was one deck down. It should be dark but I saw a glow under a walkway door. I pushed through and cautiously descended. It wasn't wet here but it was cold. The fish smell was strong.

"Brunette," I shouted again.

I imagined something heavy shuffling nearby and slipped a few steps, banging my hip and arm against a bolted-down table. I kept hold of my gun, but only through superhuman strength.

The ship wasn't deserted. That much was obvious.

I could hear music. It wasn't Cab Calloway or Benny Goodman. There was a Hawaiian guitar in there but mainly it was a crazy choir of keening voices. I wasn't convinced the performers were human and wondered whether Brunette was working up some kind of act with singing seals. I couldn't make out the words but the familiar hawk-and-spit syllables of "Cthulhu" cropped up a couple of times.

I wanted to get out and go back to nasty Bay City and forget all about this. But Jungle Jillian was counting on me.

I made my way along the passage, working towards the music. A hand fell on my shoulder and my heart banged against the backsides of my eyeballs.

A twisted face stared at me out of the gloom, thickly-bearded, crater-cheeked. Laird Brunette was made up as Ben Gunn, skin shrunk onto his skull, eyes large as hen's eggs.

His hand went over my mouth.

"Do Not Disturb," he said, voice high and cracked.

This wasn't the suave criminal I knew, the man with tartan cummerbunds and patent-leather hair. This was some other Brunette, in the grips of a tough bout with dope or madness.

"The Deep Ones," he said.

He let me go and I backed away.

"It is the time of the Surfacing."

My case was over. I knew where the Laird was. All I had to do was tell Janey Wilde and give her her refund.

"There's very little time."

The music was louder. I heard a great number of bodies shuffling around in the casino. They couldn't have been very agile, because they kept clumping into things and each other.

"They must be stopped. Dynamite, depth charges, torpedoes..."

"Who?" I asked. "The Japs?"

"The Deep Ones. The Dwellers in the Sister City."

He had lost me.

A nasty thought occurred to me. As a detective, I can't avoid making deductions. There were obviously a lot of people aboard the Monty, but mine was the only small boat in evidence. How had everyone else got out here? Surely they couldn't have swum?

"It's a war," Brunette ranted, "us and them. It's always been a war."

I made a decision. I'd get the Laird off his boat and turn him over to Jungle Jillian. She could sort things out with the Panther Princess and her Esoteric Order. In his current state, Brunette would hand over any baby if you gave him a blanket.

I took Brunette's thin wrist and tugged him towards the staircase. But a hatch clanged down and I knew we were stuck.

A door opened and perfume drifted through the fish stink.

"Mr Lovecraft, wasn't it?" a silk-scaled voice said.

Janice Marsh was wearing pendant squid earrings and a lady-sized gun. And nothing else.

That wasn't quite as nice as it sounds. The Panther Princess had no nipples, no navel and no pubic hair. She was lightly scaled between the legs and her wet skin shone like a shark's. I imagined that if you stroked her, your palm would come away bloody. She was wearing neither the turban she'd affected earlier nor the dark wig of her pictures. Her head was completely bald, skull swelling unnaturally. She didn't even have her eyebrows pencilled in.

"You evidently can't take good advice."

As mermaids go, she was scarier than cute. In the crook of her left arm, she held a bundle from which a white baby face peered with unblinking eyes. Franklin looked more like Janice Marsh than his parents.

"A pity, really," said a tiny ventriloquist voice through Franklin's mouth, "but there are always complications."

Brunette gibbered with fear, chewing his beard and huddling against me.

Janice Marsh set Franklin down and he sat up, an adult struggling with a baby's body.

"The Cap'n has come back," she explained.

"Every generation must have a Cap'n," said the thing in Franklin's mind. Dribble got in the way and he wiped his angel-mouth with a fold of swaddle.

Janice Marsh clucked and pulled Laird away from me, stroking his face.

"Poor dear," she said, flicking his chin with a long tongue. "He got out of his depth."

She put her hands either side of Brunette's head, pressing the butt of her gun into his cheek.

"He was talking about a Sister City," I prompted.

She twisted the gambler's head around and dropped him on the floor. His tongue poked out and his eyes showed only white.

"Of course," the baby said. "The Cap'n founded two settlements. One beyond Devil Reef, off Massachusetts. And one here, under the sands of the Bay."

We both had guns. I'd let her kill Brunette without trying to shoot her. It was the detective's fatal flaw, curiosity. Besides the Laird was dead inside his head long before Janice snapped his neck.



"You can still join us," she said, hips working like a snake in time to the chanting. "There are raptures in the deeps."

"Sister," I said, "you're not my type."

Her nostrils flared in anger and slits opened in her neck, flashing liverish red lines in her white skin.

Her gun was pointed at me, safety off. Her long nails were lacquered green.

I thought I could shoot her before she shot me. But I didn't. Something about a naked woman, no matter how strange, prevents you from killing them. Her whole body was moving with the music. I'd been wrong. Despite everything, she was beautiful.

I put my gun down and waited for her to murder me. It never happened.

I don't really know the order things worked out. But first there was lightning, then, an instant later, thunder.

Light filled the passageway, hurting my eyes. Then, a rumble of noise which grew in a crescendo. The chanting was drowned.

Through the thunder cut a screech. It was a baby's cry. Franklin's eyes were screwed up and he was shrieking. I had a sense of the Cap'n drowning in the baby's mind, his purchase on the purloined body relaxing as the child cried out.

The floor beneath me shook and buckled and I heard a great straining of abused metal. A belch of hot wind surrounded me. A hole appeared. Janice Marsh moved fast and I think she fired her gun, but whether at me on purpose or at random in reflex I couldn't say. Her body sliced towards me and I ducked.

There was another explosion, not of thunder, and thick smoke billowed through a rupture in the floor. I was on the floor, hugging the tilting deck. Franklin slid towards me and bumped, screaming, into my head. A half-ton of water fell on us and I knew the ship was breached. My guess was that the Japs had just saved my life with a torpedo. I was waist deep in saltwater. Janice Marsh darted away in a sinuous fish motion.

Then there were heavy bodies around me, pushing me against a bulkhead. In the darkness, I was scraped by something heavy, cold-skinned and foul-smelling. There were barks and cries, some of which might have come from human throats.

Fires went out and hissed as the water rose. I had Franklin in my hands and tried to hold him above water. I remembered the peril of Jungle Jillian again and found my head floating against the hard ceiling.

The Cap'n cursed in vivid 18th-century language, Franklin's little body squirming in my grasp. A toothless mouth tried to get a biter's grip on my chin but slipped off. My feet slid and I was off-balance, pulling the baby briefly underwater. I saw his startled eyes through a wobbling film. When I pulled him out again, the Cap'n was gone and Franklin was screaming on his own. Taking a double gulp of air, I plunged under the water and struggled towards the nearest door, a hand closed over the baby's face to keep water out of his mouth and nose.

The Montecito was going down fast enough to suggest there were plenty of holes in it. I had to make it a priority to find one. I jammed my knee at a door and it flew open. I was poured, along with several

hundred gallons of water, into a large room full of stored gambling equipment. Red and white chips floated like confetti.

I got my footing and waded towards a ladder. Something large reared out of the water and shambled at me, screeching like a seabird. I didn't get a good look at it. Which was a mercy. Heavy arms lashed me, flopping boneless against my face. With my free hand, I pushed back at the thing, fingers slipping against cold slime. Whatever it was was in a panic and squashed through the door.

There was another explosion and everything shook. Water splashed upwards and I fell over. I got upright and managed to get a one-handed grip on the ladder. Franklin was still struggling and bawling, which I took to be a good sign. Somewhere near, there was a lot of shouting.

I dragged us up rung by rung and slammed my head against a hatch. If it had been battened, I'd have smashed my skull and spilled my brains. It flipped upwards and a push of water from below shoved us through the hole like a ping-pong ball in a fountain.

The Monty was on fire and there were things in the water around it. I heard the drone of airplane engines and glimpsed nearby launches. Gunfire fought with the wind. It was a full-scale attack. I made it to the deck-rail and saw a boat fifty feet away. Men in yellow slickers angled tommy guns down and sprayed the water with bullets.

The gunfire whipped up the sea into a foam. Kicking things died in the water. Someone brought up his gun and fired at me. I pushed myself aside, arching my body over Franklin and bullets spanged against the deck.

My borrowed taxi must have been dragged under by the bulk of the ship.

There were definitely lights in the sea. And the sky. Over the city, in the distance, I saw firecracker bursts. Something exploded a hundred yards away and a tower of water rose, bursting like a puffball. A depth charge.

The deck was angled down and water was creeping up at us. I held on to a rope webbing, wondering whether the gambling ship still had any lifeboats. Franklin spluttered and bawled.

A white body slid by, heading for the water. I instinctively grabbed at it. Hands took hold of me and I was looking into Janice Marsh's face. Her eyes blinked, membranes coming round from the sides, and she kissed me again. Her long tongue probed my mouth like an eel, then withdrew. She stood up, one leg bent so she was still vertical on the sloping deck. She drew air into her lungs – if she had lungs – and expelled it through her gills with a musical cry. She was slim and white in the darkness, water running off her body. Someone fired in her direction and she dived into the waves, knifing through the surface and disappearing towards the submarine lights. Bullets rippled the spot where she'd gone under.

I let go of the ropes and kicked at the deck, pushing myself away from the sinking ship. I held Franklin above the water and splashed with my legs and elbows. The Monty was dragging a lot of things under with it, and I fought against the pull so I wouldn't be one of them. My shoulders ached and my clothes got in the way, but I kicked against the current.

The ship went down screaming, a chorus of bending steel and dying creatures. I had to make for a launch and hope not to be shot. I was lucky. Someone got a polehook into my jacket and landed us like fish. I lay on the deck, water running out of my clothes, swallowing as much air as I could breathe.

I heard Franklin yelling. His lungs were still in working order.

Someone big in a voluminous slicker, a sou'wester tied to his head, knelt by me, and slapped me in the face.

"Peeper," he said.

"They're calling it the Great Los Angeles Air Raid," Winthrop told me as he poured a mug of British tea. "Some time last night a panic started, and everyone in Bay City shot at the sky for hours."

"The Japs?" I said, taking a mouthful of welcome hot liquid.

"In theory. Actually, I doubt it. It'll be recorded as a fiasco, a lot of jumpy characters with guns. While it was all going on, we engaged the enemy and emerged victorious."

He was still dressed up for an embassy ball and didn't look as if he'd been on deck all evening. Genevieve Dieudonne wore a fisherman's sweater and fatigue pants, her hair up in a scarf. She was looking at a lot of sounding equipment and noting down readings.

"You're not fighting the Japs, are you?"

Winthrop pursed his lips. "An older war, my friend. We can't be distracted. After last night's action, our Deep Ones won't poke their scaly noses out for a while. Now I can do something to lick Hitler."

"What really happened?"

"There was something dangerous in the sea, under Mr Brunette's boat. We have destroyed it and routed the...uh, the hostile forces. They wanted the boat as a surface station. That's why Mr Brunette's associates were eliminated."

Genevieve gave a report in French, so fast that I couldn't follow.

"Total destruction," Winthrop explained, "a dreadful set-back for them. It'll put them in their place for years. Forever would be too much to hope for, but a few years will help."

I lay back on the bunk, feeling my wounds. Already choking on phlegm, I would be lucky to escape pneumonia.

"And the little fellow is a decided dividend."

Finlay glumly poked around, suggesting another dose of depth charges. He was cradling a mercifully sleep-struck Franklin, but didn't look terribly maternal.

"He seems quite unaffected by it all."

"His name is Franklin," I told Winthrop. "On the boat, he was..."

"Not himself? I'm familiar with the condition. It's a filthy business, you understand."

"He'll be all right," Genevieve put in.

I wasn't sure whether the rest of the slicker crew were feds or servicemen and I wasn't sure whether I wanted to know. I could tell a Clandestine Operation when I landed in the middle of one.

"Who knows about this?" I asked. "Hoover? Roosevelt?"

Winthrop didn't answer.

"Someone must know," I said.

"Yes," the Englishman said, "someone must. But this is a war the public would never believe exists. In the Bureau, Finlay's outfit are known as 'the Unnameables,' never mentioned by the press, never honoured or censured by the government, victories and defeats never recorded in the official history."

The launch shifted with the waves, and I hugged myself, hoping for some warmth to creep over me. Finlay had promised to break out a bottle later but that made me resolve to stick to tea as a point of honour. I hated to fulfil his expectations.

"And America is a young country," Winthrop explained. "In Europe, we've known things a lot longer."

On shore, I'd have to tell Janey Wilde about Brunette and hand over Franklin. Some flack at Metro would be thinking of an excuse for the Panther Princess's disappearance. Everything else – the depth charges, the sea battle, the sinking ship – would be swallowed up by the War.

All that would be left would be tales. Weird tales.

Kim Newman's most recently published novel is the fantasy *Genevieve Undead*, under the pseudonym "Jack Yeovil" (Boxtree, £3.99). He has contributed to this magazine many times before – in fact, his first published piece of fiction appeared here in 1984. He lives in London and is well known as a film critic.

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Transition Dreams

Greg Egan

“W e can’t tell you what your own transition dreams will be. The only thing that’s certain is that you won’t remember them.”

Caroline Bausch smiles, reassuringly. Her office, on the sixty-fourth floor of the Gleisner Tower, is so stylish it hurts – her desk is an obsidian ellipse supported by three perspex circles, and the walls are decorated with the latest in Euclidean Monochrome – but she’s not at all the kind of robot the cool, generic décor seems to demand. I have no doubt that the contrast is intentional, and that her face has been carefully designed to appear more disarmingly natural than even the most cynical person could believe was due to pure guile on the part of her employers.

A few forgettable dreams? That sounds innocuous enough. I very nearly let the matter rest – but I’m puzzled.

“I’ll be close to zero degrees when I’m scanned, won’t I?”

“Yes. A little below, in fact. Pumped full of anti-freeze disaccharides, all your fluids cooled down into a sugary glass.” There’s a prickling sensation on my scalp at these words – but the rush I feel is anticipation, not fear; the thought of my body as a kind of ice-confectionary sculpture doesn’t seem threatening at all. Several elegant blown-glass figurines decorate the bookshelf behind Bausch’s desk. “Not only does that halt all metabolic processes, it sharpens the NMR spectra. To measure the strength of each synapse accurately, we have to be able to distinguish between subtle variations in neurotransmitter receptor types, among other things. The less thermal noise, the better.”

“I understand. But if my brain has been shut down by hypothermia... why will I dream?”

“Your brain won’t do the dreaming. The software model we’re creating will. But as I said, you won’t remember any of it. In the end, the software will be a perfect Copy of your – deeply comatose – organic brain, and it will wake from that coma remembering exactly what the organic brain experienced before the scan. No more, no less. And since the organic brain certainly won’t have experienced the transition dreams, the software will have no memory of them.”

The software? I’d expected a simple, biological explanation: a side-effect of the anaesthetic or the anti-freeze; neurons firing off a few faint, random signals as they surrendered to the cold.

“Why program the robot’s brain to have dreams it won’t remember?”

“We don’t. Or at least, not explicitly.” Bausch smiles her too-human smile again, not quite masking an appraising glance, a moment spent deciding, perhaps, how much I really need to be told. Or perhaps the whole routine is more calculated reassurance. *Look, even though I’m a robot, you can read me like a book.*

She says, “Why are Gleisner robots conscious?”

“For the same reason humans are conscious.” I’ve been waiting for that question since the interview began; Bausch is a counsellor as much as a salesperson, and it’s part of her job to ensure that I’m at ease with the new mode of existence I’m buying. “Don’t ask me which neural structures are involved... but whatever they are, they must be captured in the scan, and recreated in the model, along with everything else. Gleisner robots are conscious because they process information – about the world, and about themselves – in exactly the same way as humans do.”

“So you’re happy with the notion that a computer program which simulates a conscious human brain is, itself, conscious in the very same fashion?”

“Of course. I wouldn’t be here if I didn’t believe that.” *I wouldn’t be talking to you, would I?* I see no need to elaborate – to confess that I’ve become a thousand times more comfortable with the whole idea ever since the ten-tonne supercomputers in the basements of Dallas and Tokyo began to give way to the ambulatory Gleisner robots, with their compact processors and lifelike bodies. When Copies were finally liberated from their virtual realities – however grand, however detailed they might have been – and given the chance to *inhabit the world* in the manner of flesh-and-blood people, I finally stopped thinking of being scanned as a fate akin to being buried alive.

Bausch says, “Then you accept that all it takes to generate experience... is to carry out computations on data structures which encode the same information as the structure of the brain?”

The jargon sounds gratuitous to me, and I don’t understand why she’s labouring the point – but I say blandly, “Of course I accept that.”

“Then think about what it implies! Because the whole process of creating the finished piece of software which runs a Gleisner robot – the perfect Copy of the unconscious person who was scanned – is one long sequence of computations on data structures which represent the human brain.”

I absorb that in silence.

Bausch continues, “We don’t set out to cause the transition dreams, but they’re probably unavoidable.”

Copies have to be *made*, somehow – they can't spring into existence, fully formed. The scanner has to probe the organic brain, measure the NMR spectra for billions of different cross-sections – and then process those measurements into a high-resolution anatomical and biochemical map. In other words: carry out several trillion computations on a vast set of data which represents *the brain*. Then, that map has to be used to construct the working computer model, the Copy itself. More computation."

I think I almost grasp what she's saying...but part of me flatly refuses to accept the notion that merely *imaging the brain* in high enough resolution could cause *the image itself* to dream.

I say, "None of that computation sets out to mimic the workings of the brain, though, does it? It's all just preparing the way for a program which *will* be conscious, when it's finally up and running."

"Yes – and once that program is up and running, what will it do, in order to be conscious? It will generate a sequence of changes in a digital representation of the brain – changes which mimic normal neural activity. But creating that representation in the first place also involves *a sequence of changes*. You can't go from a blank computer memory, to a detailed simulation of a specific human brain, without a few trillion intermediate stages – most of which will represent – in part or in full, in one form or another – possible states of the very same brain."

"But why should that add up to any kind of...mental activity? Rearranging the data, for other reasons entirely?"

Bausch is adamant. "Reasons don't come into it. The living brain reorganizing memories is enough to give rise to ordinary dreams. And just poking an electrode into the temporal lobes is enough to generate *mental activity*. I know: what the brain does is so complex that it's bizarre to think of achieving the same results unintentionally. But all of the brain's complexity is coded into its structure. Once you're dealing with that structure, you're dealing with the stuff of consciousness. Like it or not."

That does make a certain amount of sense. Almost anything that happens to the brain *feels like something* – it doesn't have to be the orderly process of waking thought. If the random effects of drugs or illness can give rise to distinctive mental events – a fever dream, a schizophrenic episode, an LSD trip – why shouldn't a Copy's elaborate genesis do the same? Each incomplete NMR map, each unfinished version of the simulation software, has no way of "knowing" that it's not yet meant to be self-aware.

Still –

"How can you be sure of this? If nobody remembers the dreams?"

"The mathematics of consciousness is still in its infancy...but everything we know strongly suggests that the act of constructing a Copy has *subjective content* – even though no trace of the experience remains."

I'm still not entirely convinced, but I suppose I'll have to take her word for it. The Gleisner Corporation has no reason to invent non-existent side-effects – and I'm suitably impressed that they bother to warn their customers about *transition*

dreams at all. So far as I know, the older companies – the scanning clinics founded in the days when Copies had no physical bodies – never even raised the issue.

We should move on, there are other matters to discuss – but it's hard to drag my thoughts away from this unsettling revelation. I say, "If you know enough to be certain that there'll always be transition dreams...can't you stretch the mathematics a little further, and tell me what my dreams will be?"

Bausch asks innocently, "How could we do that?"

"I don't know. Examine my brain, then run some kind of simulation of the Copying process –" I catch myself. "Ah. But how do you 'simulate' a computation...without doing it?"

"Exactly. The distinction is meaningless. Any program which could reliably predict the content of the dreams would, itself, experience *them*, as fully as the 'you' of the transition process. So what would be the point? If the dreams turned out to be unpleasant, it would be too late to 'spare yourself' the trauma."

Trauma? I'm beginning to wish I'd been satisfied with a reassuring smile, and the promise of perfect amnesia. *A few forgettable dreams.*

Now that I – vaguely – understand the reasons for the effect, though, it's a thousand times harder to accept it as inevitable. Neural spasms at the onset of hypothermia might be unavoidable – but anything taking place *inside a computer* is supposed to be subject to limitless control.

"Couldn't you monitor the dreams as they're happening – and intervene, if need be?"

"I'm afraid not."

"But –"

"Think about it. It would be like prediction, only worse. Monitoring the dreams would mean duplicating the brain-like data structures in still more forms – generating more dreams in the process. So even if we could take charge of the original dreams – deciphering them, and controlling them – all of the software which did that would need *other software watching it*, to see what the side-effects of its computations were. And so on. There'd be no end to it.

"As it is, the Copy is constructed by the shortest possible process, the most direct route. The last thing you'd want to do is bring in more computing power, more elaborate algorithms...more and more systems mirroring the arithmetic of the experience."

I shift in my chair, trying to shake off a growing sense of light-headedness. The more I ask, the more surreal the whole subject becomes – but I can't seem to keep my mouth shut.

"If you can't say what the dreams will be about, and you can't control them...can't you at least tell me how long they'll last? Subjectively?"

"Not without running a program which also dreams the dreams." Bausch is apologetic – but I have a feeling that she finds something elegant, even *proper*, in this state of affairs. "That's the nature of the mathematics: there are no short-cuts. No answers to hypothetical questions. We can't say for certain what any given conscious system will experience...without creating that conscious system in the process of answering the question."

I laugh weakly. *Images of the brain which dream. Predictions of dreams which dream. Dreams which infect any machine which tries to shape them.* I'd

thought that all the giddy metaphysics of virtual existence had been banished, now that it was possible to choose to be a Copy living wholly in the physical world. I'd hoped to be able to step from my body into a Gleisner robot without missing a beat –

And in retrospect, of course, I will have done just that. Once I've crossed the gulf between human and machine, it will vanish seamlessly behind me.

I say, "So the dreams are unknowable? And unavoidable? That's close to a mathematical certainty?"

"Yes."

"But it's equally certain that I won't remember them?"

"Yes."

"You don't recall anything about... your own? Not a single mood? Not a single image?"

Bausch smiles tolerantly. "Of course not. I woke from a simulated coma. The last thing I remember was being anaesthetized before the scan. There are no buried traces, no hidden memories. No invisible scars. *There can't be.* In a very real sense, I never had the transition dreams at all."

I finally sight a target for my frustration. "Then... why warn me? Why tell me about an experience I'm guaranteed to forget? Guaranteed to end up not having been through? Don't you think it would have been kinder to say nothing?"

Bausch hesitates. For the first time, I appear to have discomfited her – and it's a very convincing act. But she must have been asked the same question a thousand times before.

She says, "When you're dreaming the transition dreams... knowing what you're going through, and why, might make all the difference. Knowing that it's not real. Knowing that it won't last."

"Perhaps." It's not that simple, though, and she knows it. "When my new mind is being pieced together, do you have any idea when this knowledge will be part of it? Can you promise me that I'll remember these comforting facts when I need them? Can you guarantee that anything you've told me will even make sense?"

"No. But –"

"Then what's the point?"

She says, "Do you think that if we'd kept silent, you would have had any chance at all of dreaming the truth?"

Out on the street, in the winter sunshine, I try to put my doubts behind me. George Street is still littered with coloured paper from last night's celebrations: after six years of bloodshed – bombings and sieges, plagues and famines – the Chinese civil war finally seems to be over. I feel a surge of elation, just looking down at the tattered remnants of the streamers and reminding myself of the glorious news.

I hug myself and head for Town Hall station. Sydney is going through its coldest June in years, with clear skies bringing sub-zero nights, and frosts lasting long into the mornings. I try to picture myself as a Gleisner robot, striding along the very same route, but choosing not to feel the bite of the wind. It's a cheerful prospect – and I'll be untroubled by anything so tedious as the swelling around my artificial knee and hip joints, once I'm wholly and harmoniously artificial.

Unafraid of influenza, pneumonia, or the latest wave of drug-resistant diphtheria sweeping the globe.

I can hardly believe that I've finally signed the contracts and set the machinery in motion, after so many years of making excuses and putting it off. Shaken out of my complacency by a string of near misses: bronchitis, a kidney infection, a melanoma on the sole of my right foot. The cytokine injections don't get my immune system humming the way they did twenty years ago. One hundred and seven, this August. The number sounds surreal. But then, so did twenty-seven, so did forty-three, so did sixty-one.

On the train, I examine my qualms one more time, hoping to lay them to rest. Transition dreams are impossible to avoid, or predict, or control... just like ordinary dreams. They'll have a radically different origin... but there's no reason to believe that a different means of invoking the contents of my scrambled brain will give rise to an experience any more disturbing than anything I've already been through. *What horrors do I think are locked up in my skull, waiting to run amok in the data stream from comatose human to comatose machine?* I've suffered occasional nightmares – and a few have been deeply distressing, at the time – but even as a child, I never feared sleep. So why should I fear the transition?

Alice is in the garden, picking string beans, as I come over the hill from Meadowbank station. She straightens up and waves to me. I can never quite believe the size of our vegetable patch, so close to the city. We kiss, and walk inside together.

"Did you book the scan?"

"Yes. Tenth of July." It should sound matter-of-fact, like that: of all the operations I've had in the last ten years, this will be the safest. I start making coffee; I need something to warm me. The kitchen is luminous with sunlight, but it's colder indoors than out.

"And they answered all your questions? You're happy now?"

"I suppose so." There's no point keeping it to myself, though; I tell her about the transition dreams.

She says, "I love the first few seconds after waking from a dream. When the whole thing's still fresh in your mind... but you can finally put it in context. When you know exactly what you've been through."

"You mean the relief of discovering that none of it was real? You didn't actually slaughter a hundred people in a shopping arcade? Stark naked? The police aren't closing in on you after all? It works the other way too, though. Beautiful delusions turning to dust."

She snorts. "Anything which turns to dust that easily is no great loss."

I pour coffee for both of us. Alice muses, "Transition dreams must have strange endings, though. If you know nothing about them before they start... and nothing again by the time they finish." She stirs her coffee, and I watch the liquid sloshing from rim to rim. "How would time pass, in a dream like that? It can't run straight through, can it? The closer the computers came to reconstructing every detail of the comatose brain, the less room there'd be for... spurious information. At the very beginning, though, there wouldn't be any information at all. Somewhere in the middle, there'd be the most leeway for 'memories' of the dream. So maybe time would flow in from the start

and the finish, and the dream would seem to end in the middle. What do you think?

I shake my head. "I can't even imagine what that would be like."

"Maybe there are two separate dreams. One running forwards, one running backwards." She frowns. "But if they met in the middle, they'd both have to end the same way. How could two different dreams have exactly the same ending – right down to the same memories of everything which happened before? And then, there's the scanner building up its map of the brain... and the second stage, transforming that map into the Copy. Two cycles. Two dreams? Or four? Or do you think they'd all be woven together?"

I say irritably, "I really don't care. I'm going to wake up inside a Gleisner robot, and it will all be academic. I won't have dreamed any dreams at all."

Alice looks dubious. "You're talking about thoughts and feelings. As real as anything the Copy will feel. How can that be academic?"

"I'm talking about a lot of arithmetic. And when you add up everything it does to me, it will all cancel out in the end. Comatose human to comatose machine."

"Ashes to ashes, dust to dust."

Words just come out of her mouth sometimes: fragments of nursery rhymes, lines from old songs – she has no say in it. The hairs stand up on my arms, though. I look down at my withered fingers, my scrawny wrists. *This isn't me.* Aging feels like a mistake, a detour, a misadventure. When I was twenty years old I was immortal, wasn't I? It's not too late to find my way back.

Alice murmurs, "I'm sorry."

I look up at her. "Let's not make a big deal of this. It's high time for me to become a machine. And all I have to do is close my eyes and step across the gap. Then in a few years, it will be your turn. We can do this. There's nothing to stop us. It's the easiest thing in the world."

I reach across the table and take her hand. When I touch her, I realize I'm shivering with cold.

She says, "There, there."

I can't sleep. *Two dreams? Four dreams? Meeting in the middle? Merging into one?* How will I know when they're finally over? The Gleisner robot will emerge from its coma, and blithely carry on – but without a chance to look back on the transition dreams, and recognize them for what they were, how will I ever put them in their place?

I stare up at the ceiling. *This is insane.* I must have had a thousand dreams which I've failed to remember one waking – gone now, forever, as surely as if my amnesia was computer-controlled and guaranteed. Does it matter if I was terrified of some ludicrous dream-apparition, or believed I'd committed some unspeakable crime...and now I'll never have the chance to laugh off those delusions?

I climb out of bed – and once I'm up, I have no choice but to dress fully to keep from freezing. Moonlight fills the room, I have no trouble seeing what I'm doing. Alice turns over in her sleep, and sighs. Watching her, a wave of tenderness sweeps through me. *At least I'm going first.* At least I'll be able to reassure her that there's nothing to fear.

In the kitchen, I find I'm not hungry or thirsty at all. I pace to keep warm.

What am I afraid of? It's not as if the dreams were a barrier to be surmounted – a test I might fail, an ordeal I might not survive. The whole transition process will be predetermined – and it will carry me safely into my new incarnation. Even if I dream some laborious metaphor for my "arduous" journey from human to machine – trekking barefoot across an endless plain of burning coals, struggling through a blizzard towards the summit of an unclimbable mountain... *and even if I fail to complete that journey* – the computers will grind on, the Gleisner robot will wake, regardless.

I need to get out of the house. I leave quietly, heading for the 24-hour supermarket opposite the railway station.

The stars are mercilessly sharp, the air is still. If I'm colder than I was by day, I'm too numb to tell the difference. There's no traffic at all, no lights in any of the houses. It must be almost three; I haven't been out this late in...decades. The grey tones of suburban lawns by moonlight look perfectly familiar, though. When I was seventeen, I seemed to spend half my life talking with friends into the early morning, then trudging home through empty streets exactly like these.

The supermarket's windows glow blue-white around the warmer tones of the advertising signs embedded within them. I enter the building, and explore the deserted aisles. Nothing tempts me, but I feel an absurd pang of guilt about leaving empty-handed, so I grab a carton of milk.

A middle-aged man tinkering with one of the advertising holograms nods at me as I carry my purchase through the exit gate, magnetic fields sensing and recording the transaction.

The man says, "Good news about the war?"

"Yes! It's wonderful!"

I start to turn away; he seems disappointed. "You don't remember me, do you?"

I pause and examine him more carefully. He's balding, brown-eyed, kindly-looking. "I'm sorry."

"I used to own this shop when you were a boy. I remember you coming in, buying things for your mother. I sold up and left town – eighty-five years ago – but now I'm back, and I've bought the old place again."

I nod and smile, although I still don't recognize him.

He says, "I was in a virtual city, for a while. There was a tower which went all the way to the moon. I climbed the stairs to the moon."

I picture a crystalline spiral staircase, sweeping up through the blackness of space.

"You came out, though. Back into the world."

"I always wanted to run the old place again."

I think I remember his face now – although his name still eludes me, if I ever knew it.

I can't help asking: "Before you were scanned – did they warn you about something called...transition dreams?"

He smiles, as if I'd spoken the name of a mutual friend. "No. Not then. But later, I heard. You know, the Copies used to flow from machine to machine. As the demand for computing power went up and down, and exchange rates shifted...the management software used to take us apart and move us. From

Japan, to California, to Texas, to Switzerland. It would break us down into a billion data packets and send us through the network by a thousand different routes, and then put us back together again. Ten times a day, some days."

My skin crawls. "And...the same thing happened? Transition dreams?"

"That's what I heard. We couldn't even tell that we'd been shipped across the planet; it felt to us like no time had passed at all. But I heard rumours that the mathematicians had proved that there were dreams in the data at every stage. In the Copy I left behind, as they erased it. In the Copy being pieced together at the new destination. Those Copies had no way of knowing that they were only intermediate steps in the process of moving a frozen snapshot from one place to another – and the changes being made to their digitized brains weren't supposed to mean anything at all."

"So did you stop it happening? Once you found out?"

He chuckles. "No. There would have been no point. Because even in the one computer, Copies were moved all the time: relocated, shuffled from place to place, to allow memory to be reclaimed and consolidated. Hundreds of times a second."

My blood turns to ice. *No wonder the old companies never raised the subject of transition dreams.* I was wiser than I ever knew to wait for the Gleisner robots. Merely shifting a Copy around in memory could hardly be comparable to mapping every synapse in a human brain – the dreams it generated would have to be far shorter, far simpler – but just knowing that my life was peppered with tiny mental detours, eddies of consciousness in the wake of every move, would still have been too much to bear.

I head home, clutching the milk carton awkwardly with cold arthritic fingers.

As I come over the hill, I see the light on above our front door, although I'm certain that I left the house in darkness. Alice must have woken and found me missing. I wince at my thoughtlessness; I should have stayed in – or written her a note. I quicken my step.

Fifty metres from home, a tendril of pain flickers across my chest. I look down stupidly to see if I've walked into a protruding branch; there's nothing, but the pain returns – solid as an arrow through the flesh, now – and I sink to my knees.

The bracelet on my left wrist chimes softly, to tell me that it's calling for help. I'm so close to my own front door, though, that I can't resist the urge to rise to my feet and see if I can make the distance.

After two steps, the blood rushes from my head, and I fall again. I crush the milk carton against my chest, spilling the cold liquid, freezing my fingers. I can hear the ambulance in the distance, I know I should relax and keep still – but something compels me to move.

I crawl towards the light.

The orderly pushing me looks as if he's just decided that this is the last place on Earth he'd choose to be. I silently concur, and tip my head back to escape his fixed grimace, but then the sight of the ceiling going by above me is even more disconcerting. The corridor's lighting panels are so similar,

and their spacing so regular, that I feel as though I'm being wheeled around in a circle.

I say, "Where's Alice? My wife?"

"No visitors now. There'll be time for that later."

"I've paid for a scan. With the Gleisner people. If I'm in any danger, they should be told." All of this is encoded in my bracelet, though; the computers will have read it, there's nothing to fret about. The prospect of having to confront the transition in a matter of hours or minutes fills me with claustrophobic dread – but better that than having left the arrangements too late.

The orderly says, "I think you're wrong about that."

"What?" I struggle to get him in sight again. He's grinning nastily, like a nightclub bouncer who's just spotted someone with the wrong kind of shoes.

"I said, I think you're mistaken. Our records don't mention any payment for a scan."

I break into a sweat of indignation. "I signed the contracts! Today!"

"Yeah, yeah." He reaches into a pocket and pulls out a handful of long cotton bandages, then proceeds to stuff them into my mouth. My arms are strapped to my sides; all I can do is grunt in protest, and gag on cotton and saliva.

Someone stands in front of the trolley and keeps pace with us, whispering in Latin.

The orderly says, "Don't feel bad. The top level's just the tip of the iceberg. The crest of the wave. How many of us can belong to an elite like that?"

I cough and choke, fighting for breath, shuddering with panic – then I calm myself, and force myself to breathe slowly and evenly through my nose.

"The tip of the iceberg! Do you think the organic brain moves by some kind of magic? From place to place? *From moment to moment?* Do you think an empty patch of space-time can be rebuilt into something as complex as a human brain, *without transition dreams?* The physical world has as much trouble shuffling data as any computer. Do you know how much effort it goes to, just to keep *one atom* persisting in the very same spot? Do you think there could ever be one coherent, conscious self, enduring through time – without a billion fragmentary minds forming and dying all around it? Transition dreams blossoming, and vanishing into oblivion? The air's thick with them. Look!"

I twist my head around and stare down at the floor. The trolley is surrounded by convoluted vortices of light, rainbow sheets like cranial folds, flowing, undulating, spinning off smaller versions of themselves.

"What did you think? You were Mr Big? The one in a billion? The one on top?"

Another spasm of revulsion and panic sweeps through me. I choke on saliva, shivering with fear and cold. Whoever is walking ahead of the trolley lays an icy hand on my forehead; I jerk free.

I struggle to find some solid ground. *So this is my transition dream.* All right. I should be grateful: at least I understand what's happening. Bausch's warning has helped me, after all. And I'm not in any danger; the Gleisner robot is still going to wake. Soon I'll forget this nightmare, and carry on with my life as if nothing had happened. Invulnerable. Immortal.

Carry on with my life. *With Alice, in the house with*

the giant vegetable garden? Sweat flows into my eyes; I blink it away. The vegetable garden was in my parents' house. In the back yard, not the front. And that house was torn down long ago.

So was the supermarket opposite the railway station.

Where did I live, then?

What did I do?

Who did I marry?

The orderly says cheerfully, "So-called Alice taught you in primary school. Ms Something-or-other. A crush on the teacher, who'd have guessed?"

Then, do I have anything straight? The interview with Bausch - ?

"Ha ha. Do you think our clever friends at Gleisner would have come right out and told you all that? Pull the other one."

Then how could I know about transition dreams?

"You must have worked it all out for yourself. From the inside. Congratulations."

The icy hand touches my forehead again, the murmured chant grows louder. I screw my eyes shut, racked with fear.

The orderly says thoughtfully, "Then again, I could be wrong about that teacher. You could be wrong about that house. There might not even be a Gleisner Corporation. Computerized Copies of human brains? Sounds pretty dodgy to me."

Strong hands seize me by the shoulders and legs, lift me from the trolley and spin me around. When the blur of motion stops, I'm flat on my back, staring up at a distant rectangle of pale blue sky.

"Alice" leans into view, and tosses in a clod of soil. I ache to comfort her, but I can't move or speak. How can I care so much about her, if I didn't love her, if she was never real? Other mourners throw in dirt; none of it seems to touch me, but the sky vanishes in pieces.

Who am I? What do I know for sure about the man who'll wake inside the robot? I struggle to pin down a single certain fact about him, but under scrutiny everything dissolves into confusion and doubt.

Someone chants, "Ashes to ashes, come to coma."

I wait in the darkness, colder than ever.

There's a flickering of light and motion around me. The rainbow vortices, the eddies of transition dreams, weave through the soil like luminous worms - as if even parts of my decomposing brain might be confusing their decay with the chemistry of thought, reinterpreting their disintegration from within, undistracted by the senses, or memory, or truth.

Spinning themselves beautiful delusions, and mistaking death for something else entirely.

Greg Egan's second sf novel, *Permutation City*, will appear in early 1994 - see the interview with him in *Interzone* 73 for more details. He lives in the antipodean Perth, and is now widely regarded as one of the finest up-and-coming sf writers in the world. His short stories have been appearing here since 1986 - in fact, *Interzone* was the first magazine anywhere to publish his fiction (although he previously had a couple of stories in Australian small-press anthologies).

**'A GLITTERING BAROQUE
EXTRAVAGANZA' INTERZONE**

JACK THE BODILESS



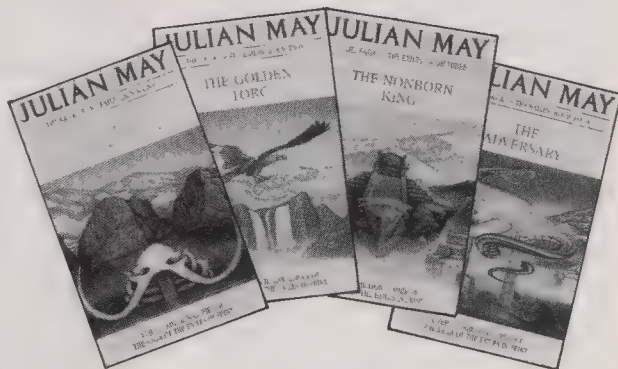
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Writing and Ritual

Diane Paxson interviewed by Stan Nicholls

Diana. A good, solid pagan name. An apt name for Diana Paxson, who professes herself an adherent of the Old Religion, a phrase which these days has an almost bewildering array of interpretations.

How would she define the nature of her beliefs? "You might call it the indigenous religion which is still found in, I wouldn't say primitive exactly, but agricultural and pastoral cultures as they remain around the world. That would include everything from Shinto, in Japan, to African tribal religions, to Amerindian tribal traditions, to the old northern European religions which were replaced more or less by Christianity. I say more or less because the medieval Church incorporated a great deal of this indigenous material.

"When you look at all of those and see what they have in common, what their underlying assumptions, beliefs and practices are, you begin to get a picture of this worldwide religion. If you look at the mythology and folklore of the British Isles, Scandinavia, Germany and so forth, you notice there are strong similarities. You begin to get an idea of what this kind of religion might have looked like in northern Europe, and it is that which the modern neo-pagan movement is trying to recover in various ways.

"Unfortunately the only word English has for anybody who does that kind of work is witch, and it gets used for everything from people who are using it for evil to village herbalists. It also gets used in anthropology for all kinds of spiritual leaders, like shamans and seers. Old Norse, for instance, had a dozen words for different kinds of magical people, depending on

what exactly it was you did. So the vocabulary has been impoverished severely in that regard. The word witch is a difficult one to work with because of all those associations. It is however a very accurate word for someone who is doing certain kinds of practice. Depending on what I'm doing, I would describe myself as a priestess or a shamaness or a witch. I tend to use the designation depending on what form of work I'm doing."

We're talking about forms of ritual here? "Oh, yes. It's a regular religious practice. There are many groups here in England, and many groups in the United States, which are living this as a regular religious practice as they would any other religion. It has developed to the point where there's a certain amount of tradition associated with it and a fairly large community where you have people who know each other nationally and internationally. For example, I was for two years first officer of the Covenant of the Goddess, which started as a national American organization but now has members in England and elsewhere."

Paxson's upbringing, however, was anything but paganistic. "I was brought up mostly Christian Scientist, which I must say was good preparation for accepting the power of belief in achieving things. But Christian Science is very much against symbolism of all kinds. Then, when I was a child, my family joined the Presbyterian church for a while – you have to understand that in the States people do this sort of thing – because my mother was a seeker, really. But when I was in college the chaplain was Episcopalian, which is the American Church of England, and

he was a wonderful man. A great scholar and a true priest. He knew exactly what he was doing with the ritual and it was extremely powerful when he did it. He used to give sermons on the symbolism and its meaning, and I realized instantly that ritual was where it was at for me. So I ended up becoming Episcopalian and president of the Canterbury Club [an Episcopal student organization].

"Unfortunately, by that time the Episcopal church was going through a modernization period like everybody else, and they started throwing out as much of the ritual as they could get away with. Which was losing what had attracted me. I have no quarrel with Christianity, unlike some pagans who had really bad experiences as children, but I gradually realized that what I was after was the elements the Episcopal church had preserved from the medieval Church.

"During that same period, the whole neo-pagan movement was developing, and I finally discovered some people who were doing rituals and so forth. And I found I had a talent for it. This was at the point where the feminist movement and women's spirituality were really getting going. So I ended up becoming a leader in that movement in the States."

Beginning to write her *Westria* series (published in Britain by New English Library), she says, completed the "conversion" process. "I found it was kind of interactive. When I started writing the *Westria* books I was still attending a Christian church, off and on, as well as doing some pagan stuff. Gradually, as I envisioned the fictional world I was developing, the paganism began to feel more and more right

to me. There were a lot of things I wrote about in the first few books that were fairly theoretical and which have since become practical; experiences that imaginatively I knew must be possible, but didn't expect to ever have. Since then I have learned that you don't have to simply be born with certain talents; there are ways you can develop them."

The books became more than a writing chore, she explains – they were a voyage of self-discovery. "They were definitely that, as well as a discovery of the processes of writing.

"I started writing about Westria in 1971. In fact it was the first serious work I did. I had taken a creative writing course in college and the professor wanted everybody to do social realism. At Mills College, which was a pretty upper-middle-class institution, the closest most of the girls had ever come to social realism was their mothers' cleaning ladies. So I tried, but I was very bad at it, and concluded I would never be able to write anything worth reading. So why bother? For ten years I didn't do a thing.

"In the meantime, however, I married a man who had been selling science-fiction stories. He was sort of adopted into the family of Marion Zimmer Bradley, so she was effectively my sister-in-law. Finally the penny dropped that here was Marion and she was writing these books, and I liked to read them and other people liked to read them, so maybe one could write a book. Gee. I thought, 'Okay, I'm going to finish something.'

"So I started writing this thing, and it's the only time I've ever done an open-ended story, where I simply wrote a scene and wondered, 'What will happen now?' Because I figured if I knew what happened I wouldn't bother to write the book. Ever since then I've outlined extremely thoroughly before I start writing a book. Anyway, it was pretty awful. But things started emerging, and there was enough really neat stuff in it by the time I got done that Marion said, 'Yes, this has promise.' So I polished it and I sent it around, and I got all these regretful letters back from editors, but they were letters, not standard rejection slips."



Diana Paxson

At the time, the only thing selling was children's fantasy. "Despite Tolkien, adult fantasy as a genre didn't exist, really," Paxson recalls. "Consequently I re-fashioned this book as a framed children's fantasy, with two children from contemporary Berkeley running into two children from another time. But I didn't tell anyone what I was doing because they might laugh at me.

"That first book came back and came back. I finally thought, 'This is not saleable.' Then, realizing I had four magical jewels at the heart of the plot, I decided to break it into four books. Otherwise it was a great waste of material. I wrote the first two of those books and sent them out. I got lots of nice responses but, again, nobody bought them.

"I eventually thought, before yet another rewrite, that I really needed to figure out how my characters got into the mess the plot had them in. So I went back and started to write the prequel, which in the very first version had consisted of two paragraphs that explained, you know, 'The reason we are under siege in this castle is because...' To cut a long story short, that first paragraph became *Lady of Light* and the second paragraph became *Lady of Dark-*

ness. And they were very definitely adult stories. Fortunately, by that time there was beginning to be an adult market, so I discarded the idea of them being for children and aimed them at an adult audience.

"I think what really made the difference was my realization that I had to let it all hang out. I made the decision not to worry what anybody would think about me after having read the book. I've run into that barrier with aspiring writers a number of times since, where they're holding back because, 'What will happen if my family reads this?' Especially if they have sex scenes in their work or anything, really, *real*; sex, violence or spiritual experience. Topics that get to the gut level. But you can't write unless you're willing to lay your guts on the line.

"Marion had sold an old occult novel of hers to Dave Hartwell, who was then at Pocket Books, and I thought, 'Well, if he's interested in that, just maybe...' By then I'd been writing short stories, and sold a couple, so I had my toe in the door. I'd also written a couple of other novels that had been making the rounds and not selling. But this is all part of the process; you're expected to write half a dozen novels for the wastepaper basket before you get going. Anyway, I

sent the thing to Hartwell. He took about a year to formally make up his mind, but eventually took it."

Was Westria conceived as a series from the outset? "It had to be a series. We were going through a period where nothing was longer than 90,000 words, and this was a 180,000-word manuscript. I saw which way the wind was blowing and structured it so it could break in the middle without horrendous pain. So, as I say, it came out as *Lady of Light* – volume one – and *Lady of Darkness* – volume two.

"Unfortunately Pocket Books trashed their science-fiction line just as the second book was coming out, so there were only about a hundred copies published. They're extremely rare and valuable now. But by then I'd sold another book, to Ace, and I just sort of went along like that until Hartwell found a new home and went around gathering all his chickens under his wing again. I rejoined him and continued the series."

Why choose fantasy as a vehicle in the first place? Did it reflect her own early reading preferences? "I read as a child a lot of mythology. And horse books! My mother had a mythological period in her youth and she named me Diana on purpose. Later on she wouldn't have considered it. So, knowing that my name came out of Greek mythology, I thought I'd better read up and find out what I'd been doing. This led to Amerindian legends and anything else I could get my hands on. I also read a lot of archaeology and anthropology. That was what I was really into.

"I realize now, seeing the kind of thing I've got into writing, that my real bent is towards a particular stage of culture. Whether we're talking about Homeric Greece, early Celtic, early Germanic or whatever, there are certain cultural unities, commonalities if you like, which I feel an affinity toward and want to write about.

"In college I discovered the Middle Ages and really got into that. They called me 'Diana Paxson the Anglo-Saxon'! When I got out of Mills and went to graduate school at Cal, I discovered you could do an MA in Comparative Lit, taking mostly medieval courses. That was grand.

"I knew a number of people in fandom in the early 1970s, and two of the young men I knew were trying to recreate the medieval art of sword and shield fighting by actually doing it. I got to thinking of how much all these other people I knew who were getting their degrees, some of them in fandom, would enjoy seeing that. So the Society for Creative Anachronism was born and has since, heaven help us, become an international organization with a budget that would support a good sized family for a year. There are members in Europe and Japan as well as the United States."

For the next ten years she was involved with the organizational development of the SCA. "Although my preference may be for a period that's a bit earlier than the medieval, the organization has become a wonderful research tool. If I need to know period forging, there are people I can go to, or falconry or weaving or dyeing – you name it – any kind of period craft. There are people I can go and ask, and see it done. Eventually I kind of pulled out of the SCA and other people took over, but I continue to maintain a good relationship with them, and I dip in and out and attend things occasionally. It's been fascinating to watch how that whole movement, I guess you could call it, developed."

Paxson had missed out on reading a great deal of fantasy fiction until she reached graduate school. Then the chairperson of Mills College's English department, Elizabeth Pope, pointed her in a new direction. "She had read J.R.R. Tolkien as the books came out in the 50s, and had been preaching the gospel all through the 60s, pre-American paperback," Paxson says. "I was in the habit of going in to see her every week or two and saying, 'What shall I read next?' In a way that was my real education. One day I was about to go home on Christmas vacation and she said, 'Have you read Tolkien yet?' Reading *Lord of the Rings* over the Christmas vacation was a revelation to me, and before long I was also reading C.S. Lewis like mad, and Charles Williams. So it was the Inklings big three."

Presumably she regards Tolkien as a benign rather than malign

influence on the field? "When I was writing that original manuscript, I kept coming to plot problems that Tolkien had already solved in the best possible way. So you have to either copy him, which has been done, or find some other way of solving the problem that isn't as good. My solution had to be to move away from his kind of thought pattern. So Tolkien was a benign influence for me in the sense that I learned a great deal about how to put a plot together by doing structural analyses of *Lord of the Rings*.

"If you study his books you'll see that, for example, after the heroes have a moment of great tension they always find somebody who feeds them something. You'll see the way that the tensions in the plot go, the way he balances different kinds of scenes. You'll see his technique of throwing in poetic quotations to give a sense of history, and his use of botanic detail, that kind of thing. As a writer he's extremely instructive. There's a great deal to be learned from Tolkien without necessarily writing that kind of plot.

"If there was a negative influence, it was publishers jumping on the bandwagon. This happens in all genres. It was wonderful that the sales of *Lord of the Rings* convinced publishers adult fantasy could sell. That led to Lin Carter resurrecting all of these people that deserved to be republished, and Conan came along. But a certain number of people, in some cases people who had been writing science fiction, suddenly realized fantasy was selling better than sf. That was really revolting to the old hard-science writers, but some of them said, 'Oh, all right, I'll do a fantasy,' you know? But their hearts weren't really in it. They knew all the notes but they didn't know the music.

"I think what a lot of them didn't realize, and the publishers didn't care about, was that to write the kind of mythopoetic fantasy Tolkien did you have to have spent years studying the subject. Tolkien lived it. It was probably more real to him than his daily surroundings a lot of the time.

"But I think things are starting to rebalance themselves now and we'll see a shaking-out of that sort of mechanistic fantasy." ●

Chronotetannymenicon

David Wishart

We had dined that Sunday, the four of us, at a small hotel near Richmond. We were sitting in the lounge overlooking the garden, our pipes lit and our waistcoats unbuttoned, chatting of this and that: of the prospects of a war between China and the Tsar over Uzbekistan; of the Queen's coming Jubilee; and of the recent yellow press revelations of Prince Albert's infidelities.

There was a pause in the conversation, and the Poet, who had been gazing through the window, suddenly exclaimed:

"Now that's rum! That really is very odd!"

"What's odd?" inquired the Lawyer.

"Look at the clouds in the porch window."

I followed his pointing finger. The porch, with its plate-glass windows, jutted out from the front of the hotel almost parallel to our line of sight. Its end-pane divided the right-hand quadrant of the sky vertically into two, and this dividing line served as a hinge for the illusion. The clouds, driven by a strong wind, were moving rapidly across the sky from right to left, while their images flew from them in a contrary direction. The effect was quite hypnotic.

"Nothing rum about it!" the Scientist snapped, and proceeded to expatiate for several minutes on the laws of reflection and refraction.

The Poet listened politely, his jaw muscles tensing occasionally as if he were stifling a yawn.

"I see," he said at last. "Much obliged to you. But all I wanted to know, old man, is why the reflections move faster than the real thing."

The Scientist opened his mouth, then closed it. The Lawyer gave a bellow of laughter.

"Well, speak up!" he said. "Answer the man!"

"I think you will find," said the Scientist with some acerbity, "that both travel at precisely the same speed. Any discrepancy," he looked pointedly at the glass of wine by the Poet's elbow, "can be attributed to other factors."

When the general laughter had died down, he added:

"Of course, if anything the effect should be the opposite."

We regarded him with interest.

"How so?" inquired the Lawyer.

"By the rules of physics," said the Scientist, "anything which changes direction loses energy. Being composed of reflected light, the clouds in the glass ought to move more slowly."

"Oh, come now!" I said. "We're not all as unscientific as our friend here. In the first place, light has no

mass and therefore is not governed by the rules of matter. In the second..."

The Scientist held up his hand.

"One moment," he said. "It is certainly assumed that light has no mass, but we cannot accept such an assumption as proven fact."

"But what of Ricci's Theory of Relativity?" I objected. "You would, I take it, agree with him that the speed of light must be a constant?"

The Scientist picked up his pipe and lit it, taking time over the operation.

"You know, of course," he said, "that in Newtonian physics time is a constant while motion, as applied to mass, is a variable factor?"

"Of course," I said. "Naturally. But..."

"While in Riccian physics time is a variable which changes as a moving body approaches the constant of light speed?"

"Yes, and that is precisely why..."

"The point I am making," he overrode me, "is that, if light can be shown to have mass, the anomalies that exist between the two systems need not be irreconcilable, and whichever of the two systems operates at a given time depends purely on the circumstances. Of course, it follows that if the two systems are one and the same, there must be reciprocity. As time is a variable in Riccian physics while the speed of light is a constant, so in Newtonian, where time is the constant, the speed of light must be capable of variation, given that light has mass. Do you see what I mean?"

I looked at the Lawyer. He was nodding sagely, but his eyes were glazed. The Poet had lost all interest in the conversation and was gazing out of the window at two attractive ladies walking across the lawn. My own mind was far from clear, and I was already regretting our third bottle of claret.

"The problem is," I said, "that none of this theorizing admits of empirical proof. We may be able to envisage the time distortion experienced by a traveller in a rocket travelling at light speed, but..."

"There is no distortion," the Scientist interrupted. "Such a traveller would not experience distortion. Subjectively, his time would be the same as yours or mine. A discrepancy would only become apparent if the two time-lines subsequently re-merged."

"I expressed myself badly," I said. "All I wished to say was that travel at such speeds remains only a theoretical possibility."

"You are forgetting that we have an alternative."

"Which is?" I said.

"Instead of speeding our subject up, we can slow light down."

"But surely that is equally impossible!"

"You think so?" the Scientist said softly.

It was the tone of his voice, rather than the question itself, which gave me pause; but, although I badgered and wheedled and finally resorted to words and tactics that no gentleman should properly employ towards another, the Scientist would not be drawn. And there for the moment the matter rested.

An invitation to dinner at his home the following Friday accordingly roused in me hopes of a secret revealed. We dined alone, but when it became clear from the manner in which he turned aside all references to it that the subject remained closed I found it hard to suppress a feeling of disappointment.

We had been sitting for some time over our brandy and cigars, talking of this and that, when he suddenly stood up and said, with no perceptible change of tone:

"I thought we might just step down to the laboratory for a moment."

Wordlessly, but in a state of some excitement, I followed him towards the stairs. The laboratory was in the basement of the house, and would have done justice to the physics department of a fair-sized university. The Scientist led me to a steel table in one corner, on which lay a box with the dimensions of a small tea-chest. After a quick glance at my host to ascertain that no other help or information was forthcoming, I proceeded to examine it.

The sides were made of what appeared to be totally-black metal, and the box had a lid fastened by a small catch.

"No, don't open it yet," said the Scientist as I undid the catch. He was standing next to me with his arms folded, smiling indulgently like someone watching a child investigate a new toy.

I picked the box up to inspect its underside. Or rather, I tried to pick it up, for it proved to be heavy as lead. Finally, I succeeded in raising it an inch or so from the table-top – just enough to see that it was in no way attached by its base – and then carefully lowered it again.

"What have you in there?" I asked. "Gold bricks?"

The Scientist's smile broadened.

"Nothing," he said. "Open it now, and see."

I did so. The box was quite empty. Stranger still, the plates which formed its sides were a mere quarter-inch thick.

"I'm sorry," I said, "but you will have to explain."

"In a moment." He took out his watch – a gold half-hunter – from his waistcoat pocket. Then he hesitated, and held out his hand towards me.

"I think perhaps," he said, "we shall use yours instead, if you don't mind."

Mystified, but with my feeling of excitement growing ever stronger, I drew out my own watch and detached it from its chain. The Scientist glanced at it, then at his own, and held the latter up for my inspection.

"Two minutes of a difference," he said. "You agree?"

I looked. His watch read ten twenty-seven, mine almost ten thirty. I nodded. He replaced the half-hunter in the fob of his waistcoat.

"Put your watch in the box, if you will, and close the lid."

I did so, and he immediately led me over to a blackboard mounted on the far wall of the laboratory.

"My major problem," he said, "was one of scale. Light travels at the speed of 186,000 miles per second. For time to become a variable, Riccian physics demands that the subject – the hypothetical man in the rocket – be accelerated to light speed. You agree?"

I nodded.

"You are familiar, of course, with the Fitzgerald-Lorentz Contraction?"

"Remind me," I said.

"It is quite straightforward." He turned to the blackboard. "Let us consider an object with length L_0 . As it is accelerated to light speed, its new length L will be reduced in accordance with the Contraction as follows."

And he wrote:

$$L = L_0 \sqrt{1 - v^2/c^2}$$

" V being the velocity of the object and c the speed of light. You understand?"

"So far, yes," I said cautiously.

"Now with regard to time," he continued, "there is a corresponding lengthening effect, expressed of course as the inverse."

$$T = \frac{T_0}{\sqrt{1 - v^2/c^2}}$$

"Naturally at normal speeds $\sqrt{1 - v^2/c^2}$ produces a factor very close to 1. If we wish to lengthen time to double its usual value, then the Fitzgerald-Lorentz factor must be reduced accordingly, thus:"

$$\sqrt{1 - v^2/c^2} = 1/2$$

I was now totally out of my depth, and could only nod; but he was oblivious to any reaction on my part.

"Squaring both sides," he said, "gives:

$$1 - v^2/c^2 = 1/4$$

"And so:

$$v^2/c^2 = 3/4$$

"Accordingly:

$$v/c = \sqrt{3/2} \approx 0.8, \text{ ie } 4/5."$$

He wrote this last term with a flourish and turned to me as if addressing a class of students.

"You see now, of course, what I meant about scale?"

I smiled inanely and made no answer.

"If we wish," he said, "to extend time to twice its normal length then we must reduce the speed of light until it approximates walking pace; that is, it must be slowed down by a factor of ten to the eighth power."

Delivered at the end of what, to my non-mathematical mind, had been a perfectly rational and coherent exposition, the Scientist's conclusions came as an almost physical shock.

"But that is impossible!" I said.

Instead of replying, he walked over to the table on which the box stood.

"Take out your watch," he said, "and let us see."

I did so. He held up his own side by side with mine and we compared them.

Both watches read ten thirty-two.

I stared like an idiot, but there was no mistake. He had been talking for a good five minutes, and yet the watch in the box had counted less than half that time.

"The secret, of course," the Scientist was saying, "lies in the composition of the glass of which the box is made. In the case of normal glass, a beam of light will pass through relatively unimpeded. Yet if the glass offers too much of an impediment then the light will not pass through at all. This 'slow glass' – the name, I may say, is not my own but a coinage of my able assistant Mr Robert Shaw – is at the same time incredibly dense and totally permeable to light."

"But it's completely opaque!" I protested.

The Scientist clicked his tongue in exasperation.

"It certainly seems so," he said, "to the external observer. The reduction in light-speed has a subjective effect similar to a drastic lengthening of the wavelength. Think, if you like, of a path through an almost infinite maze of gently-curved reflecting walls. Along this path the light travels, careering from wall to wall, losing speed as it goes until it finally exits from the maze and is released. Do you understand?"

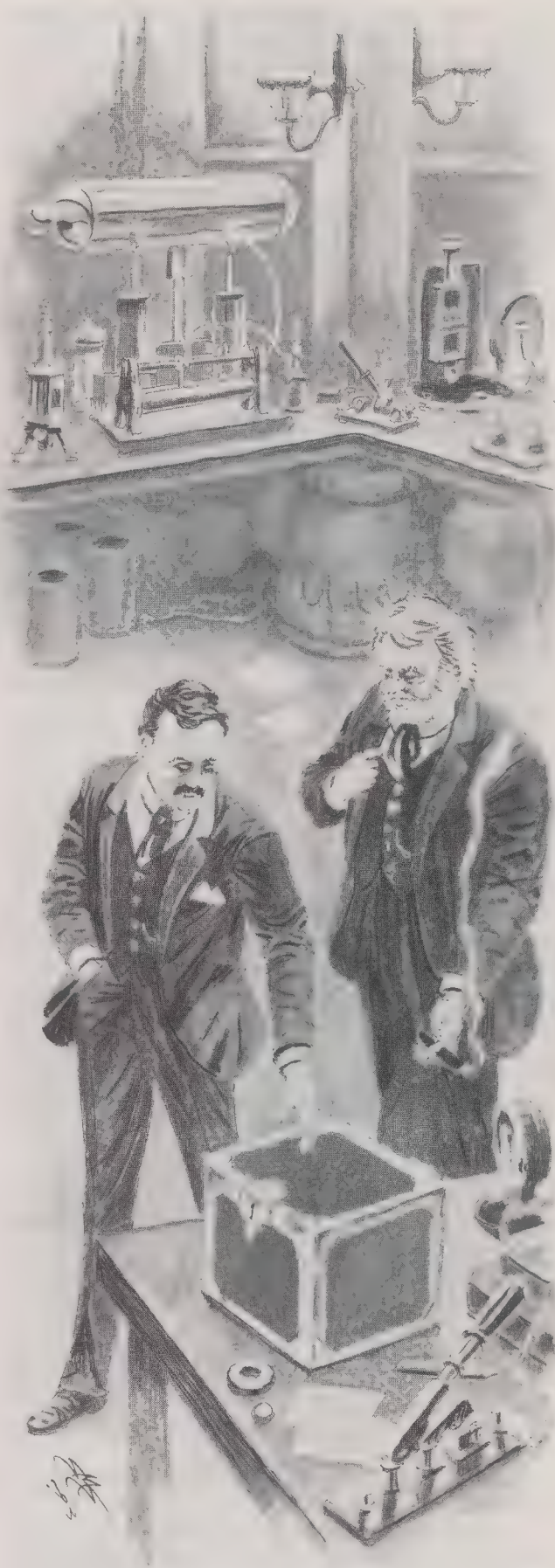
I fear that by this point I was only listening with half an ear. Unlike my friend, I am no scientist in the pure sense of the word; I believe, with the poet Horace, that a thing has no purpose unless it shines with use. Now, as I looked at the incredible glass box, I felt my brain racing. I found myself mentally increasing its size a hundred, and then a thousandfold, until it reached the proportions of Paxton's Crystal Palace; and my second thought, following closely on the heels of the first and related to it, was that the Queen's Diamond Jubilee was only a year away.

The two thoughts came together with the explosive force of a small charge of dynamite.

"I don't suppose, my dear fellow," I said, "you have considered the practical applications?"

Construction of the Chronotetannymenicon (the word, for those who have no Greek, means "the place of extended time") took several months. Originally it had been planned to rival the Crystal Palace in size, but even using the most up-to-date titanium steel framework the plate-glass sections proved far too heavy. Accordingly, the building was redesigned to be a mere two storeys high, covering an area of only six thousand square feet and located immediately to the north of Hyde Park.

The building's temporal effect was tested accidentally only hours after structural completion. Our unwitting guinea-pig was the flooring contractor, who spent a subjective hour inside and discovered on leaving that a mere twenty-seven minutes had passed. He unfortunately but understandably communicated his story to the press; with the result that although the Chronotetannymenicon was not due to open to the public for a further six weeks its unique properties were already common knowledge; a fact that was to be of great significance to the course of future events.



Illustrations by SMS

"A BOX WITH THE DIMENSIONS OF A SMALL TEA-CHEST"

The first hint that something was amiss came shortly after external work was completed. My friend the Scientist and I were summoned to an office in Whitehall.

"It appears," the senior civil servant charged with the matter said carefully, "that we have a leak."

The Scientist frowned. Without invitation, he seated himself on a chair in front of the desk.

"In what way?" he said.

The Civil Servant consulted the letter in front of him.

"The insurance company," he said, "occupying the building immediately adjacent to the Chronotetannymenicon site report complaints by their staff that after working a normal nine-to-five day they find the time on leaving to be five forty-five." He looked up. "Whilst describing himself as a fair-minded employer, the company manager is unwilling to pay overtime unnecessarily in the cause of science."

"You say," said my friend, "that they are losing time?"

The Civil Servant handed him the letter.

"The facts are as I have stated them," he said stiffly.

The Scientist read it, then sat deep in thought for several minutes. Finally he said:

"This is not a leak, then. It is something quite different."

"Perhaps, sir," replied the Civil Servant, "you could be a little less Delphic."

From his jacket pocket, the Scientist drew out a notebook, which he consulted.

"The problem," he said, "had already occurred to me in a slightly different form, as a theoretical possibility. Given that light travels not only from outside to inside the Chronotetannymenicon but also vice versa, at the point of egress it must, if it is to reconform to the demands of our everyday time continuum, be instantly accelerated by a factor of ten to the sixteenth power – that is, of course, taking into account both the initial deceleration and that subsequent to its passing a second time through the slow-glass plate. The amount of energy required for this would certainly be sufficient, if leached directly from the environment, to produce an instantaneous drop in surface temperature averaging approximately ninety centigrade degrees over an area of three hundred square miles."

There was instant and complete silence.

"And you did not think it proper," said the Civil Servant at last, "to apprise us of this fact before the Chronotetannymenicon was built?"

The Scientist closed his notebook with a snap.

"Of course not," he said. "I had no reason to."

"May I ask why not?"

"Because no such leaching takes place. Had it done so, it would have shown itself at the experimental stage."

The Civil Servant relaxed visibly. I noticed that his forehead was beaded with perspiration.

"Then," he said, "I fail to see what relevance it has to the present problem."

"I merely wished to show," said the Scientist, "that, with its return, as it were, to Newtonian physics the light invokes his Third Law. A balance must be struck, and the accelerative energy has to come from somewhere. It is interesting – and fortunate – that the equal and opposite reaction should be temporal rather than physical."

"But," I pointed out the obvious, "the reaction is not an equal one. The clerks lose only minutes, not hours."

"I would imagine," said the Scientist, "that the effect diminishes in proportion to the inverse square of the distance."

"Then you consider the phenomenon unimportant?" The relief in the Civil Servant's voice was palpable.

"Certainly," the Scientist said. "It may be necessary to evacuate the buildings immediately adjacent to the Chronotetannymenicon, but I foresee no additional problems."

In this, however, he was gravely mistaken.

His error in judgement became all too painfully apparent over the next few days. The complaints swelled from a trickle to a flood. The insurance company was forced to move staff to its other offices in Fulham, while half a dozen other firms at increasingly greater distances from the Chronotetannymenicon were also affected. To their complaints were added those of private householders in the area while, worst of all, the press had the bit firmly between their teeth and were pulling on it for all they were worth.

The first riots occurred before the week was out. They had begun as small orderly protests by Anarchist groups concerned only with embarrassing the government; but the view of the Chronotetannymenicon as a form of devilish temporal leech had struck a superstitious chord in the lower classes, with the result that popular unrest grew with horrific rapidity. The Chronotetannymenicon itself was immediately cordoned off, but the violence spread until the authorities had virtually lost control of the area bounded by Hyde Park, Praed Street and the Edgware Road and were forced to call in the troops. Deprived of Speakers Corner, the mob gathered under Marble Arch and, amidst much impassioned oratory, burned the Scientist in effigy.

On the day following this I had a message from my friend, asking me to meet him in Hyde Park. The park itself and the area surrounding it was now virtually an armed camp, but my government pass worked its magic and the sergeant on the barricade saluted smartly and allowed me through.

The Scientist was standing slightly apart from a mixed group of army officers and civilians. He was deep in conversation with a tall, stooped, elderly gentleman in a frock coat. As I hailed my friend, the other turned towards me.

It was the Prime Minister himself.

I made my excuses, of course, at once, and would have moved off, but the great man shook his head at me. Although his face was drawn, the voice which had been Britain's for almost two generations did not tremble.

"Well, well," he said, "you must do your best. Keep me informed."

And without another word he walked slowly away from us in the direction of St James's and the Palace.

I seized my friend's arm, and he turned to face me. I was shocked by the change in his appearance. Gone was the air of solid respectability which had characterized him. Instead, there was a mad wildness to his

eye, and he had evidently long given up any attention to his personal appearance.

"For God's sake," I said, "what is wrong?"

Instead of answering, he pointed northwards, towards the Bayswater Road and the Chronotetannymenicon itself.

I looked. Although it was mid-morning on a bright October day the edge of the park was deep in shadow; and the more I looked the more I realized that beyond the shadow lay a deeper darkness which my eyes could not penetrate.

"It is spreading," said the Scientist. "It is spreading faster than I would have believed possible."

"But you said that the effect would stabilize itself!"

"I was wrong. I believed that light would accelerate to its normal speed instantaneously on leaving the glass. Evidently it does not."

"But surely," I said, "that cannot be so very important?"

He bit back an oath. Then, clearly mastering himself with some difficulty, he continued in what was almost a parody of his former dry academic style.

"Let us distinguish first of all," he said, "between *slow time* – that is, the time within the Chronotetannymenicon – and *fast time*, the phenomenon with which the – ah – disturbances are concerned."

On the word "disturbances" he gave me a ghastly smile.

"In the beginning, the fast time field commenced at the outside edge of the glass and extended – weakened, of course, in accordance with the inverse square law – a matter of perhaps fifty to sixty yards. Assuming as I did that the photons were accelerated instantaneously, I saw no reason for that situation to alter."

"But..." I began. He motioned me to be silent.

"However," he went on, "it appears that, as it leaves the Chronotetannymenicon, light is travelling for an infinitesimal space of time at a speed *slower* than 186,000 miles per second. To compensate for the discrepancy, under Newtonian laws, there is a slight reactive temporal shift into slow time which persists until the situation is stabilized. This in turn extends the abnormal conditions through which the light is forced to move beyond the glass, and the process is repeated and consolidated. In effect, the Chronotetannymenicon is building up a series of slow-time skins like an onion, and with each skin the fast-time field is pushed farther and farther outwards."

"And if this process is allowed to continue?"

He raised a haggard face to confront mine, but made no answer.

"Then it must be stopped," I said. "We must dismantle the thing before it is too late."

"It is already too late," he whispered, "for we can no longer reach it to do so."

His words chilled me. I looked again towards the shadow at the edge of the park, and had a momentary vision of it as a living organism, spreading outwards like a cancer to engulf the whole of London. I shivered.

"You will remember," my friend was saying, "Zeno's paradox of Achilles and the tortoise. However fast Achilles may run, when he reaches the point where the tortoise has been it has already moved on. That expresses our situation perfectly. The temporal



"THE BATTLE OF THE CHRONOTETANNYMENICON HAD BEGUN"

abnormalities generated by the Chronotetannymenicon make it impossible for us to approach it, for as we advance so it retreats from us, remaining tantalizingly always beyond our grasp. Look, and see for yourself."

As he spoke, I had been aware of figures moving in the darkness. At first they had seemed insubstantial as ghosts, drifting through the shadows with incredible slowness. Now as they came closer I could see that they were ordinary soldiers in battledress; and, although they were still too far away for their faces to be visible their general demeanour and stumbling walk recalled the hopeless lassitude of a retreating army.

As the first of them drew abreast of us, from over to the left came the thud of a mortar, then a second, then two more. We watched the shells arc their way above the shadow and drop towards its heart like stones thrown into a pool. I waited for the explosions, but none came. The darkness had sucked them in, and given back not even the sound of their passing. My friend watched, and on his face was a bitter smile.

"It is completely useless," he said. "I have told them that, relatively speaking, a bullet or a shell moves no faster than a man and thus will never reach its target. However, it can do no harm. Let them have their fun."

And so the attack on the Chronotetannymenicon began. When I left, the soldiers were dragging a battery of heavy guns into position; but by that time I think that they, too, had given up hope.

I felt restless that evening, restless and depressed. It was a fine night, and after dining at Cunningham's in Curzon Street, instead of returning to my rooms in Bruton Place I found myself walking east along Piccadilly towards the Nelson Memorial. Despite the clement weather there were few people abroad, and the capital had an air of mourning that the bright lights did little to dispel. I carried on past the Memorial with its huge brass cannons, hearing once again in my mind's ear the thud of the guns in Hyde Park, and continued up Shaftesbury Avenue – my intention being, I suppose, to take in some tinselly performance that would dispel my gloomy thoughts: a music-hall, perhaps, or the latest Gilbert and Sullivan operetta. However, the garish billboards produced in me only a feeling of nausea, and I found that my feet were carrying me towards the New Globe and the Royal Shakespeare Company's production of *Hamlet*.

I can remember little of the performance, good though it no doubt was, and I must have dozed off. When I woke, the play had reached a point more than half way through the third act. *Hamlet* had just confronted the Queen, Polonius had met his end, and the Prince was describing to his mother how he intended to circumvent Rosencrantz and Guildenstern:

and it shall go hard,

*But I will delve one yard below their mines,
And blow them at the moon.*

I believe, in my semi-dazed state, that I shouted aloud. Certainly I can recall a ring of startled, outraged faces and official hands hustling me out into the street, while all the time I was trying to explain at the top of my voice that *light cannot travel through solid earth*.

I covered the distance between Shaftesbury Avenue and Hyde Park at a run. In the process I lost my hat and came on at least three occasions as close as I have ever been to death under the wheels of an omnibus. Arriving at the barricade, I could only thrust my pass beneath the surprised sergeant's nose and lean gasping against the barrier while he checked it suspiciously. Finally I pushed my way through and raced across the grass to where I had last seen my friend.

He was no longer there, of course, but I recognized an artillery officer whom I had seen that morning ordering the positioning of the guns. Even in my present state I noticed with a certain detached amusement his eyes take in my dishevelled appearance and winded condition.

"A tunnel!" I gasped. "We can blow the thing up from beneath!"

There is little more to tell. The Underground line between Marble Arch and Lancaster Gate runs almost directly below the north side of the Bayswater Road. In a matter of hours it had been closed, a tunnel excavated to a point directly beneath the Chronotetannymenicon and a huge charge of dynamite laid. Together, the Scientist and I watched as the contacts were closed and, in the Danish Prince's words, we blew the foul thing at the moon.

My friend did not long survive his brainchild's destruction. Broken in health and spirit, and pointed at with execration in the streets, he left London for the Continent; and a few months later a telegram from Interlaken informed me that he had passed away in his sleep.

His notes, I am told, together with details of the process for the manufacture of slow glass, have not been destroyed but lie hidden in a government vault beneath Whitehall. Perhaps, one day, some other scientist will take up the problem which my friend had so tragically laid down. I often wonder if things might have turned out differently had we possessed some means of manufacturing a one-way glass by which light might have been admitted into the Chronotetannymenicon but denied egress.

But that is for the future to show.

(With thanks to Dr Ian Ramsay for his help with the maths)

David Wishart first appeared in *Interzone* with "Maud" (issue 63), and the above is his second story for us. He lives in Carnoustie, Angus, Scotland.

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miss an issue. Details on
page 42.**

Ansible Link

David Langford



What, not another *Encyclopaedia*? As I typed this, a death struggle was raging between publishers Little, Brown and Millennium, to determine which lucky imprint would commission the as yet unwritten *Fantasy Encyclopaedia*. But the deadline is on me and presumed editor John Clute has yet to reveal the outcome...

The March of Mind

Piers Anthony's personal statements are always intellectual treats. In the *British Fantasy Society Newsletter*'s "Desert Island Books" spot he chooses, for his "single item of no practical use whatsoever," a critic. Also he would take *Finnegans Wake* plus a guide to understanding it (written presumably by a cr*t*c), and the complete works of George Bernard Shaw (that fine dramatic and musical cr*t*c). Why Shaw? "As an outspoken vegetarian writer of greater competence than the critics claim, I relate well to him..." I love it, I love it.

Les Dawson, who died in June, will be remembered as a very funny comedian and not – we hope – for his staggeringly awful horror-fantasy *A Time Before Genesis* (1988). A lengthy and appalled discussion of this work was published by David Garnett as "How Not To Write A Novel"...

David A. Hardy, sf artist, announces the 20th birthday of his green plasticene alien "Bhen" (created in 1973; seen on various *F&SF* covers, usually cocking a snook at bits of NASA hardware, since November '75; endemic in Birmingham). Dave protests that Bhen is not a "little green man" but, as evident from the scale of the accompanying space junk in the paintings, over two and a half metres tall. *How did a mere artist afford all that plasticene?*

Carl Sagan habitually asks UFO nuts who claim personal contact with alien intelligence to prove it by passing on their superior ETs' proof of Fermat's Last Theorem. Following Professor A. Wiles's mindboggling announcement of a proof at a Cambridge lecture this summer, Sagan could soon be getting a lot of mail... Since the hard bit of the argument reputedly runs to 200 pages, Fermat was quite right: a bloody enormous margin will be needed to contain it.

Theodore Sturgeon, I learned to my surprise when Leslie Charteris died

this year, was ghost-writer for the weirdest of all the Saint stories: "The Darker Drink" (1947) – retitled "Dawn" in the 1949 collection *Saint Errant*.

David Wingrove's legendary "Chung Kuo" series is being repackaged by NEL: it was doing less well than hoped, so obviously the covers must be at fault. Out goes the old "hard sf" image (that's what they say; it looked like a chinoiserie image to me) and in come sensuous Jim Burns covers from the US editions, with the words "Chung Kuo" reduced to microprint. The new blurb line "Blade-runner meets Shogun in the epic future history" has already provoked imitations... when offered a similar catchphrase for his *Harm's Way*, Colin Greenland looked a little pale at the thought of "Doc Smith rapes Jane Austen on the high spaceways!"

Infinitely Improbable

Stamp Out Moriarty! Royal Mail stamps depicting scenes and people from Sherlock Holmes stories are to appear on 12th October, marking the centenary of Holmes's "death" at the Reichenbach Falls (er, but...). Our editor suggests a write-in campaign for stamps showing Wells's Martians, but that centenary isn't until 1998: how about Eloi and Morlock stamps for *The Time Machine* (and the Glasgow World SF Convention) in '95?

Meng & Ecker 6, latest issue of the first comic to be banned in the UK, turned up from Savoy Books. The highlight is a 7-page official transcript of the Greater Manchester Police interviewing scriptwriter David Britton about seized comics last year: it's non-communication to the point of surrealism, with a polite constable baffled as to why anyone should do art involving horrid things like war crimes or death camps. Admittedly I wasn't that wild about *Meng & Ecker 6*, which offers a scattering of OK jokes amid much murky artwork and determined Greater Manchester Police-baiting (good heavens, such bravery, here is someone screwing a pig, the frontiers of art are hurled back). But I would defend to the point of extremely minor inconvenience Savoy's right to publish it. The price is £1.75.

Syntax Corner. Our horror-fantasy titbit of the month comes from an

Aussie radio news bulletin describing a corpse: "In an advanced state of decomposition, she was said to be an affectionate mother."

Yet More *SF Encyclopaedia Updates*. The most mysterious item in the first update leaflet concerns Harlan Ellison: "*The Book of Ellison* (1978) is unauthorized." Since most of this book's text is by Ellison himself, this implies wicked literary piracy on the part of publisher Algor Press – that is, Andrew Porter of *SF Chronicle* infamy, who remarks somewhat bitterly that HE never objected when receiving royalties: "If the book was unauthorized, then Ellison's left hand didn't know what his right hand was agreeing to." Meanwhile spies report that the most vituperative comments on the *Encyclopaedia* came from Piers Anthony, that one of the US computer nets rang with cries of rage at the "omission" of Vonda McIntyre (someone misunderstood the alphabetization convention), and that Larry Niven responded to *SFE* hints about loss of "joy" in his later work by sadly agreeing it was so.

Raiders of the Lost Duck. Anecdote from the Lucasfilm Archives in California, a state-of-the-art 28,000 sq ft barn: archivist Don Bies grows weary of visitors asking if they can open the Ark of the Covenant from *Raiders*, and of telling them their very souls might be endangered. So inside this prop he places two objects, and waits. In due course a brave fool lifts the lid and reels back at ultimate horror: a Howard the Duck mask and a sign reading I TOLD YOU YOU'D REGRET OPENING IT. Strange sense of humour my correspondents have...

Attention *SF Foodies*. Copies of the sf cookbooks sold to fund the James Tiptree jr Award are available at last in the UK – SAE to 94 London Road, Reading, RG1 5AU. Recipes and jokes by Ursula Le Guin and many more.

Ten Years Ago. The *Times Literary Supplement* discussed Japanese comics' conventional sounds for common activities like slurping noodles (*suru-suru*), reddening with embarrassment (*po*), adding cold cream to hot coffee (*suron*) and vanishing into thin air (*fu*). The news that "When a penis suddenly stands erect the accepted sound is *biin*" led to wild surmise about a Japanese origin for the famous sound of Robert Heinlein's nipples, *spung*...

Mutant Popcorn

Nick Lowe

"Movies and life," mused Aristophanes of Byzantium two hundred years BC: "which is the original, and which the copy?" And one of the many interesting things about **Last Action Hero** is that it's founded on the premise that the difference is self-evident to a ten-year-old child, while demonstrating in practice that it's anything but. Here, after all, is a film which is set partly in "the movies" – where morality works, all women are waistless models in plastic fetish suits, and the laws of narrative override the laws of nature – and partly in "the real world" – where we're assured that evil can win, pain is real, and characters have dimensions. You can tell, apparently, because it's NY instead of LA and is full of people playing "themselves," including Arnold Schwarzenegger in a small role as a mysteriously opaque and charmless character called Arnold Schwarzenegger. ("Is this guy a success story or what? Only in America!") And yet, of course, the rules still hold. When we're assured that this a world in which the hero does not necessarily succeed in his attempt to jump between buildings, we feel complete idiots for holding our breath as he tries. When single mom Mercedes Ruehl announces herself in her first line as (a) widowed and (b) under 40, we think without thinking: ah, there's the token Latino wench he always gets off with, except when it was Rae Dawn Chong. When the kid hero puts *fun before family* and tries to sneak out to the pictures, he is punished by a violent mugging quite literally the moment he unlatches the door. Bad moof, kid. You made – as I believe you put it yourself – the classic movie mistake.

Yet it's hard to recognize in *Last Action Hero* itself the film so savagely beaten up by US critics ("a movie without a movie...leaves one nostalgic for *Hudson Hawk*" – *Variety*) and, to a lesser but still significant extent, stayed away from by the dino-crazed public. Though the competition admittedly isn't much of a threat, this is surely the big goof's most effective comedy to date, and unless innocence is weighed heavily as a virtue it must be somewhere about his fourth best film overall. Obviously it gambles a lot on its

powers of disarmament, and seems to have lost the first round. But its ambitions are huge, its sophistication considerable, and its appetite for risk commendable in itself. What seems to have brought the project crashing is far less the actual content than the incidental raw critical nerves brushed in passing. Everybody feels friendly towards safe, "satirical" movies like *The Player* that reassure us that all these achieving people are unfulfilled and morally stillborn minibeasts; but if there's one thing that's guaranteed to go straight up critics' noses like a Stanley knife it's a *Stardust Memories* number about all the pain and farce of being a big film name trying to escape from your own myth and the embarrassments of your work and your audience. And worst of all if, on top of all the necessary hubris, self-referentiality, and toplining of ego that such a project entails, you spend huge amounts of money getting it made and huge levels of hype persuading the despised audience to come and see it. "I don't really like you," says Jack Slater to Arnold Schwarzenegger, and the feelings, clearly, are shared in a number of directions.

Undeniably, there are weaknesses in the whole conception. One fundamental awkwardness is that there is, of course, no Jack Slater. Schwarzenegger has played this character once – in *Commando*, the film that invented him as a hero – but has spent the whole of his subsequent career trying to escape it (not altogether successfully, as the *Simpsons* parodies testify). For our Arnold there can be no Rambo, no Indie, no Harry Callahan, no series character in whom the actor is submerged. Quite the contrary, he's built his screen identity and cult on the way the performer keeps bursting through the shirt of his roles, so that whatever character he plays becomes piquantly high-concept by the mere fact of being played by this preposterous and charismatic apparition. Thus the film's attempt to differentiate between "Arnold Schwarzenegger" the actor and "Jack Slater" the screen character he portrays is already a garbling of the relationship between man and movies, because unlike every other major star

of the nineties (and it's worth remembering he didn't actually emerge as the undefeatable world heavyweight until 1990) Schwarzenegger's career has been simultaneously powered and cursed by the inescapable fact that no matter how he develops as an actor he will never be able to play a character in the normal sense, any more than Ben Grimm can take part in an identity parade. In the movie, Austin O'Brien is emphatically a fan of Jack Slater, not of Schwarzenegger, and is able not merely to separate the two but to discard the second, when in real real life there are no T800 fans, merely Arnold fans. And on top of all that, it's in any case a good five years since the man himself last consented to play this kind of straight shootup hero without some fairly intensive deconstructive twiddling to ironize the character away in the process, of which this is just the most needlessly explicit to date.

And there are plenty of unresolved narrative difficulties as well. The climax in the "real" world is a bit too short and much too light on ideas to satisfy its buildup; and if the real-world dangers are made artificially more exciting by the pretence that they're not pretend, the "movie" thrills are inevitably less thrilling by the converse assurance that they're fake. Though the countless logic gaps and loose ends can arguably be excused if not quite overlooked, Slater's kickboxing Valley-babe daughter is unforgivably thrown away, as if nobody's tumbled to the extreme happeningness of this type of violent-femme character in '93. And though even the movie's worst enemies have a grudging good word for the *Hamlet* routine, it would be senseless to pretend that all the jokes fire on cue – with the *Seventh Seal* gag in particular so painfully clumsy it becomes a kind of inadvertent joke at itself ("Bergman's Masterpiece ABOUT DEATH!", glosses a useful placard, with a zoom into the last two words).

So, clearly, this is a film where the audience cards polarize. Schwarzenegger's involvement is (a) a daring demolition of his own star identity and the whole film genre that created it, (b) a ghastly, embarrassing parade of epic



vanity and sneering contempt for the films and the audience that made it possible in the first place. The relentless barrage of movie in-jokes is (a) reason in itself to go back *again and again*, (b) an expensive, consistently unfunny, and wastefully self-indulgent abuse of budget that could probably have financed Hal Hartley's next five films. McTiernan (a) is comfortably at home in this fragile border country between thrills and absurdity, (b) loses all momentum in the first half hour and can't direct comedy to save his pathetic life. Charles Dance (a) is perfectly used and has a killer whale of a time, (b) simply cashes the cheque and goes through the motions with effortlessness, vacuous professionalism. The overall result is (a) a smart, witty ideas movie that acknowledges the depth of moral and critical sophistication that even a ten-year-old instinctively applies to the most mindless and unredeemable exploitative trash, (b) a woe-folly pious, laboured, and navel-gazing homily on the entertainment industry's divine right to be violent, infantile and dumb. And if I see that man do one more interview where he flannels about it being such a Great Zommer Moofie I'll (a) feel a pang of sympathy for a noble giant left beached and helpless under the prods of twittering insects, (b) chuck a chair through the screen and disappear over the rooftops, to be found weeks later living off cats and small rodents on the edge of a landfill near West Hartlepool. So, how did you score? Mostly (a)s? Mostly (b)s? Mostly a nagging feeling of both? Don't forget the answers for *Jurassic Park* have to go on a separate form.

Meanwhile, for advanced students, we have Robert Lieberman's alien-abduction movie *Fire in the Sky*, which introduces itself with the far from innocent boast "Based on a True Story." Now, inasmuch as this movie version of the Arizona UFO case of 1975 shows us a gang of loggers trying to convince the authorities that an alien spacecraft made off with their colleague, the claim is legally true. But it artfully obscures the real issue, which of course is whether the loggers' own story was true – especially that of the self-proclaimed abductee himself, who resurfaced five days later claiming amnesia, and subsequently filled in the missing days with one of the most detailed and classical abduction-experience flashbacks. Given that the truth or fantasy of this narrative is the question on which the whole affair turns, there are at this point three movie options. There's the *Cry in the Dark* solution, accepting without scrutiny the viewpoint and account of one of the principals; there's the *Martin Guerre* option, letting cat out of bag at the climax; or there's doing a *Reversal of Fortune*, keeping the movie version

ambivalent and agnostic to the end. Somewhat uncomfortably, *Fire in the Sky* tries to mix them, persuading you it's going to stick with the third before casually dropping it for option A in the final half-hour. Thus we begin not with the incident itself but with the loggers' reporting of it, the UFO encounter carefully staged as a dubious flashback, and when the camera eavesdrops on their conversation amongst themselves the dialogue remains studiously ambiguous about what really happened to their buddy ("We're sticking to our story, right?" as they prepare for interview; "You know they're not going to find Travis," as they discuss how to deal with the threat of a murder inquiry). Yet when the missing D.B. Sweeney finally turns up all this careful neutrality is happily jettisoned, with best mate Robert Patrick sneaking into his ward to do a monologue in which his veracity is suddenly put beyond question. After that, the hero's violent and undeniably powerful flashback to his experiences aboard the mothership carry an overwhelming imprimatur of truth.

Or rather, of course, of truth within the frame of the actual movie, for so many details of the case have been fictionalized that the film version is of no use whatever to anyone intrigued by the fundamental question of whether any of the alien stuff ever actually happened. It's all very well for *Fire in the Sky* to try and displace the centre of the drama away from the truth or falsity of the incident itself to the impact on the survivors and their community – to make it a story of what happens to half-a-dozen blue-collar guys in check shirts and dodgy marriages when they try to convince the world that their pal Travis Walton (his real name!) has been spacenapped by saucer people. But when you go as far as to include a Feb '93 postscript that all the principals passed a second polygraph 18 years on, it seems a bit disingenuous to suppress the detail that the real Travis Walton failed one at the time; or that the abduction memories didn't come tumbling out in a huge ILM flashback under the kitchen table, but like Whitely Strieber's were teased out of him

under hypnotic regression, surely something to set the uh-oh alarm bells clanging. You can argue that necessary dramatic economies lie behind all such factoidal decisions, but it's odd they all nudge the narrative in the same direction of bogus veracity – as do the very substantial changes made to Walton's account of his shipboard examination, where both the aliens' appearance and their inspection of his person have been heavily remodelled in line with the now-standard Communion archetype of slanty eyes, pointy faces, and a really bad day at the dentist's for all available orifices.

There are, to be sure, both good things and bad about *Fire in the Sky* that have nothing to do with any of this. The mothership sequence is visceral and vivid, and the performances are all good – especially Patrick, whose famous face (glimpsed predictably in a gag cameo in *Last Action Hero*) looks unrecognizably different with some actual emotion on it. On the debit side, Tracy Tormé's script is clogged with the crudest sort of TV-movie dialogue, especially when trying to set up characters ("You're a dreamer, Travis. You're not ready for marriage") or fill in huge chronological cuts ("I don't think Katie 'n' me're gonna work out," says Patrick, to reappear divorced years later: "Bin a long time – what is it, two years?" "Two 'n' a half"). But in the end the one thing you're looking for from this movie is something that will persuade you, against all your cynical instincts and resistant rationalism, that these events might actually have happened – that there might really be incomprehensible beings out there in the void waiting to whisk you off and stick their sinister tubing up your back passage, Oo-er! feel that little shiver? But if you get hooked enough to chase down the book, you find to your horror that your very willingness to suspend disbelief has itself been abducted, intimately probed and coolly exploited, and that once again the invitation to distinguish between real life and fiction is just a rhetorical ploy – in short, that the moofie lied. Tsk, tsk. *Bad mistake.*

(Nick Lowe)

Ruella in Love

Molly Brown

Queen Ruella of the combined kingdoms of Tanalor and Hala, twice-widowed and still a virgin, opened her eyes to bright sunlight streaming through her window. She yawned and stretched like a cat; then she sat up and planted a big sloppy kiss on the Lord of Darkness poster mounted beside her bed. Of course most of his features weren't visible – just a single red eye glaring out from beneath a dark hood – but she'd smeared a bit of glue where she guessed his mouth should be, so every time she kissed the poster, it stuck to her lips and made a satisfied smacking noise that made her giggle.

She'd just had the most wonderful dream: she'd married the Lord of Darkness, who was madly in love with her, and she'd gone to live in his huge black tower, where orcs waited on her hand and foot, granting her every wish, and everybody, but everybody, addressed her as "Your Dark Ladyship." She winked at the poster and hugged herself in delight – it had to be a premonition, it just had to be.

She was standing in front of the mirror, trying out some new devastating poses, when there was a knock at the door. "Come in," she said.

A tall, skeletal figure in hooded black robes loomed in the doorway. It pushed back its hood, revealing a head divided into two sections – one half was bare skull, the other covered with rotting flesh – and fanned itself with a batwing mounted on a stick. The creature had one eye loosely hanging from a socket on the fleshy side. One long black string of hair, twisted into a perfect corkscrew curl, sprouted from what was left of its scalp. An occasional maggot could be seen crawling down its face. "Oh honey, it's like an oven in here," the creature said, "mind if I open a window?"

"Go ahead."

The creature crossed the room, pushed the shutter open, and sighed, "That's better." It turned back to Ruella, the fleshy side of its mouth raised into a smile. "So how's the birthday girl?"

Ruella shrugged. "I'm okay."

The creature grabbed her by the shoulders and planted a huge kiss on her cheek. "I could just eat you up! You know that?"

Ruella sighed and rolled her eyes, wiping bits of rotted lip off her face. "Oh please. Can we just get on with it?"

"Tetchy tetchy," said the creature. "All right, sit."

Ruella sat down in front of the mirror. The creature positioned itself behind her. It shook its head, *tsk tsk*'ing and clucking disapproval. "Your ends are dry

as dust! Girlfriend, you need some long-term intensive conditioning and you need it bad." Like so many of the hangers-on around the palace these days, the creature didn't have a reflection, so in the mirror Ruella's hair seemed to be moving around all by itself.

"Let's just worry about tonight, okay?"

"All right, all right. So what did you have in mind?"

"I want it all spikey on top, and then I want this bit here," she took hold of a large strand at the front, "to sort of come down over my forehead and cover one eye." She pulled the strand across. "Like this."

"Oh no no no! Look," the creature pulled Ruella's hair back, "you've got beautiful eyes and a high intelligent forehead – you don't want your hair hanging over your face. A nice upsweep, that's what you want."

"No it isn't!" Ruella snapped. "Stop trying to make me look like an old lady. Do what I tell you or I'll chop off your head!"

"Ooh, get her!" The creature placed its hands on its hips and rolled its one dangling eye. "That's your idea of a threat, is it? Well, let me tell you, Missy, I've been beheaded more times than you've had hot breakfasts! So you'll have to do better than that for a threat now, won't you?"

Ruella slumped down in her seat, pouting. "But it's my birthday!"

The creature pursed the fleshy side of its mouth. "Oh all right," it said, picking up a comb. "I can never stay mad at you for long, can I?"

There was another knock at the door, and another tall skeletal creature in black robes entered. It approached Ruella and leaned down, briefly pressing a fleshless mouth against her cheek. "Happy birthday," it said in a rasping voice not unlike the sound of gravel crunching beneath a pair of heavy boots.

Ruella brushed away a few worms the rasping-voiced creature had left on her face.

"Sorry," said the rasping voice.

"No problem. So what's up?"

The creature reached inside its robes and produced a scroll, which it unrolled with a quick flick of its wrist. "Behold the guest list for tonight."

Ruella scanned the list. "I don't see the Lord of Darkness – hasn't he RSVP'd?"

"Well, the Lord of Darkness doesn't go to many sweet-sixteen parties."

"But this isn't just any sweet-sixteen party! This is my sweet-sixteen party!"

"I sent him an invitation. There's nothing more I can do."

"Don't worry, honey," said the one with the dangling eye, "he might still turn up." It turned towards the rasping voice, "You better put him on the list, just in case. You don't want him vaporizing the guards or anything, do you?"

"You've actually met him, haven't you?" Ruella asked the dangling-eyed one.

"Once or twice."
"What's he like?"

"All seeing, never sleeping..." the rasping voice broke in.

"No, I mean is he cute?"

"Cute?" said the rasping voice.

"Cute?" said the dangling eye. "Honey, he's absolutely horrible! He's the epitome of evil! Cold and cruel without a shred of human decency or feeling. Of course he's cute."

"You think he'd be the type to mind that I murdered my father in order to take over the kingdom, then murdered my first husband in order to take over his kingdom, and then forcibly married my step-son who was actually kind of cute but then committed suicide on our wedding night rather than consummate the marriage? I mean, if he and I were dating?"

"He'd probably take it as a recommendation," said the dangling eye. "Now hold still and be quiet; I'm almost finished."

"Why don't you put her hair up?" the rasping voice asked the hairdresser. "She'd look so pretty with her hair up."

The party was well under way long before Ruella came downstairs. The throne room was packed with sorcerers, wizards, lesser despots, and corpses in various states of decay, all bobbing to the latest music. Dozens of Dwarves were stationed on high platforms around the room, waving their hands in front of wall-mounted torches to make a strobe effect. Outside, a queue of nearly two thousand people and creatures waited in vain – the guards were under strict instructions: "If your name's not on the list, you're not getting in." And in the unlikely event that any woman or girl might possibly be considered even *slightly* prettier than Ruella, she was to be sent away immediately, list or not.

Ruella made her grand entrance at moonrise. After much argument, she'd finally got the hairstyle she wanted: huge back-combed spikes that stood out in all directions. She'd circled her eyes with black ash and dusted her face with Dead Body Shop Crushed Bone Powder (not tested on Hobbits) to give her a super-chic pallor. She wore a gown of skin-tight black leather slit to the thigh, and carried a ten-foot-long bullwhip loosely coiled in one hand.

A hushed silence fell over the room; all activity ceased. Ruella leaned petulantly beneath a gilded archway, the hand with the bullwhip resting on her hip. She studiously curled her upper lip, giving the crowd the *oh-so-mature-and-jaded*, *seen it all* and *found it too dull* for words look she'd been practising in the mirror for the past two hours.

A rasping, gravelly voice rose from somewhere near the back and the entire throng joined in a rousing chorus of "Happy Birthday." Ruella dropped her jaded lip-curl and fell into a fit of giggling as a group of hooded figures lifted her above the crowd, bouncing

her up and down sixteen times. They finally dropped her onto her throne, where she fell back, gasping for air.

"Speech! Speech!" the hooded figures shouted.

Ruella stood up and signalled for silence. "I've only got one thing to say: Where the hell are my presents, you bastards!"

The hooded hordes rushed forward and swept her up again.

"I'm sorry I asked!" she shouted as they carried her across to the stage. At the approach of a throng of hooded corpses, the musicians stepped aside, leaving the stage to Ruella, who'd been dumped stage-centre. "Okay," she said, looking down at her empty hands, "who's got my whip?"

"I do!" shouted a hooded figure surrounded by a haze of buzzing flies.

"You're dead, buddy," Ruella said, pointing a threatening finger.

"I know that!"

The room exploded into hysteria.

"I'm the one who's having the birthday!" Ruella whined in mock despair. "How dare you get all the laughs!"

Ruella had to stay on the stage as the guests trooped forward with their gifts, and she had to look grateful, though it wasn't easy. She'd never seen such a collection of rubbish: lengths of silk and emerald tiaras – real old lady stuff. Did they really think she'd be caught dead in a tiara? And then somebody gave her a solid gold spinning wheel! A *spinning wheel*? Who did they think she was, somebody's grandmother? "Gee, thanks," she said when it was all piled up in front of her.

"Make way! Make way!" a rasping voice shouted from the doorway. "Behold the beloved Queen of Tanalor and Hala's birthday present from the members of her household, for which we all chipped in!"

A hooded figure made its way towards the stage, leading a night-black horse.

Oh no, Ruella thought, not another horse. She already had a stable full of the damn things, and all they did was eat. "It's a horse," she said, trying not to sound too disappointed.

"This is no ordinary horse, my Lady," the rasping voice replied as it reached her. "This is what is known in the trade as 'souped-up'."

"Souped-up? What do you mean?"

"Behold the horse in first gear. It looks like an ordinary animal, does it not? Ideal for shopping or occasional leisurely jaunts to the country. But when I do this..." The creature grabbed the horse's tail and turned it clockwise twice. The hooves split open, revealing a set of wheels. "That's only second gear," said the rasping voice, "wait 'til you see third!" It turned the animal's tail three more times. A pair of wing-shaped panels sprang out from the animal's sides; its nostrils belched smoke. "You control it here." The rasping creature picked up a section of the horse's mane. "This way's up, this way's down, the middle holds it steady."

Ruella clapped her hands and jumped up and down. "It's fabulous!"

Of course she had to try it out right away. She jumped on the horse's back and rode outside, where the unfortunate thousands were still queuing. They

cheered when they saw her and then they gasped in unison; the horse had risen from the ground and was circling several feet above their heads. "My beloved people," Ruella shouted down at them, "thank you for coming out to celebrate my Sweet Sixteen. I'm sorry none of you will be allowed inside the palace tonight, but then you're peasants so you understand how it is. Now, if you'll excuse me," she said, turning the horse back towards the palace, "I've got some partying to do." The horse dropped something unpleasant on several members of the crowd. "Oops," said Ruella, stifling a giggle.

It was early morning, and from her bedroom window high atop the palace, Ruella watched the last of the revellers leaving. She stepped back into the shadows when she saw a wizard from Lithia step into the courtyard; he was looking straight up at her window. She'd been hiding from him for the last hour; she never should have gone behind the stables with him to smoke that Wizard's Weed – the guy seemed to think that meant they were going steady. She watched her guards usher him through the gate, and sighed with relief. She was tired, and all she wanted to do was sleep.

She was just taking off her make-up when there was a loud knock at her door. "Oh no," she moaned, thinking the Lithian had found his way back into the palace. "Who is it?" she asked sharply.

"It's me," replied a rasping voice.

"Come in." She waited until the hooded figure had closed the door behind itself. "What's up?"

"I've brought you your birthday present."

"What? The horse?"

"No. The horse was a gift from all of us. This is a gift from me." The creature reached into its robes and pulled out a small round piece of clear crystal.

"What is it?"

"Behold the latest in communications. No longer need you rely on messengers that may not bring a reply for days – with this you can speak face to face with anyone you want to, instantly. Anyone who has one of these, that is."

"Wow," said Ruella. "How does it work?"

"You just tell it who you want to contact; it does the rest through a bit of minor sorcery."

"And you can see them and hear them and everything?"

"Yes. Provided they're at home."

"Nifty! And does the...um..." Ruella's cheeks were burning; she lowered her head and stared at her feet. "Does the...?"

If the rasping-voiced creature had eyebrows, it would have raised them. "Does the Lord of Darkness have one? Is that what you're trying to ask me?"

Ruella giggled.

"I believe he does. He has all the latest gadgets."

As soon as Ruella was alone, she combed her hair and put on a fresh coat of make-up. She tried on six different outfits before she changed back into the one she'd been wearing to begin with. She practised a new facial expression in the mirror – she wanted the casual, *just called up to say "hi"* look, which she achieved by baring her teeth in an open-mouth grin and opening her eyes a little wider than usual.

She took a deep breath, gathered up her courage, and approached the table where the creature had placed the crystal ball. "The Lord of Darkness, please," she said. "Calling the Lord of Darkness."

A woman's voice replied, "That ball is busy. Will you hold?"

"Uh...okay." Ruella rushed back to the mirror for a quick check. She couldn't go through with it; she couldn't possibly let the Lord of Darkness see her like this, she'd been up all night and she looked terrible.

"Putting you through now," said the crystal.

The crystal ball transformed itself into a giant red eye. "Hello?" boomed a harsh male voice. "Who's there?"

Ruella crept behind the table and threw a cloth over the crystal, breaking the connection. A moment later, she grinned to herself. At least she knew that he was home.

She called him three more times that day, just to make sure he hadn't gone out.

After a week of calling the Lord of Darkness and throwing the cloth over the crystal as soon as she heard his voice, Ruella got the brilliant idea that if she just happened to be riding past his Dark Tower – because she just happened to be in the neighbourhood – she just might run into the Lord of Darkness in person. First she made a quick call on the crystal ball, just to make sure he was home, then she got dressed.

With her new horse cruising in third at an altitude of about two hundred feet, it took her less than two hours to reach the Dark Land. It was everything she'd ever dreamed of, a stark land almost bare of vegetation, where sulphur mists rose beneath a blood-red sky. And it would all be hers, once she got over the minor problem of making the Lord of Darkness fall madly in love with her.

She brought the horse in for a landing about a mile away from the Dark Tower, and had it continue at a leisurely trot. As she approached the Dark Tower, she noticed a single red light burning in a window near the top. That had to be his chamber.

She rode past once, watching the window from the corner of one eye. Then she rode past again. Then once more, just in case.

Ruella was sound asleep when the round crystal began to make a ringing noise. "Wha'?" she said, opening her eyes.

"Hello, Ruella!" said a man's voice. "Remember me?"

It was that moron from Lithia! Ruella had to think quickly. "Ruella no here," she said, disguising her voice and hiding her face behind a blanket, "I yam de cleaner. Ruella go out, she no say when she come back."

"I see. Can you tell her I called, please?"

"Yeah, yeah. I give her message. You go now, I gotta clean." She threw her blanket on top of the crystal and sighed.

Sometimes, when Ruella rode past the Dark Tower, the red light moved from one window to another, but no one ever came outside. In fact, she never ran into anyone when she was in the Dark Land; if it wasn't for

the moving light in the tower, she would have thought the whole place was deserted. She began to wonder if it was time to change tack.

"What does the Lord of Darkness like better than anything?" she asked the creature with the dangling eye.

"Desolation, I suppose. He's quite big on desolation."

"No, I mean like what do you think he'd like to receive as a gift? You can't give someone desolation, can you?"

"No," the dangling eye agreed, "but you can give them the means of desolation."

"Like what? I would have thought he's got all the means of desolation he needs."

"Yeah, but he likes to get gifts of soldiers. He gets through a lot of soldiers in a year – he can always use more."

"Soldiers," Ruella said. "I never thought of that."

The Lord of Darkness didn't even send a thank-you card. Ruella was sulking in her room when there was a knock at the door. "Go away," she said.

"It's me," said a rasping voice.

"I don't care who it is. Go away."

The door opened and the hooded figure entered. "I have urgent news," it said.

"I don't care," Ruella said, sticking out her lower lip.

"You must listen," said the rasping voice, grabbing her by the shoulders. "The Lord of Darkness has been defeated."

"WHAT?"

"He has been driven from his tower."

"But that can't happen! He's all powerful."

A sound like the scraping together of two boulders came from somewhere deep within the creature's skeletal chest; it was crying. "The Lord of Darkness has lost his powers," it said between sobs, "and with his fall, our own are greatly lessened."

"What are we gonna do?"

"I don't know."

Just then, the crystal made an awful ringing sound, loud and insistent. "If it's that Lithian again..." Ruella said, gritting her teeth. She moved over to the table where the crystal sat. "Hello?"

The crystal became filled with a single glowing red eye. "Ruella?" said a harsh male voice.

"Yes. Who is this?"

The eye moved backwards, becoming smaller. Finally, Ruella was able to make out a bald-headed man with a single red eye, a long crooked nose, and dark blue lips. He was holding a heart-shaped box of candy and a dozen roses. "It's me, baby. The Lord of Darkness. But you can call me 'Malcolm' – all my friends do."

"What do you want?"

"I was thinking maybe I could drop by tonight. I've been meaning to call you for a long time, but I've been so busy with this 'n' that, you know how it is. But now I've got some time on my hands, I thought we could get to know each other, know what I mean?" He winked and ran a forked blue tongue suggestively around his cracked blue lips. "You are one foxy chick, Ruella."

"I'm sorry," Ruella said, "but I'm busy. I'm washing my hair tonight."

"Oh, I see. Well, sure if you're busy." The Lord of Darkness paused a moment, thinking. "I know! How about if I just come over anyway, and kinda hide out in your castle for a while? You see there's these guys that are kinda looking for me..."

"Beat it, loser," Ruella said, throwing a cloth over the crystal.

"Your Majesty!" a herald shouted, rushing into the room. "The Knights of Light and Honour, led by the barbarian champion Glorioso, are heading this way! They should be here within four hours!"

"We're doomed!" said the rasping voice. "We don't even have an army any more, because you thought they'd make a nice gift!"

"Shut up and let me think," Ruella snapped. "Okay," she said, turning to the herald, "I want everyone in the throne room in fifteen minutes. Got it?"

"Got it," said the herald, exiting quickly.

"Don't worry," Ruella told the rasping voice as she pulled down her Lord of Darkness poster and scrunched it into a ball.

Fifteen minutes later, Ruella addressed her household. "I'm sure you've all heard the news by now. The Lord of Darkness is fallen, and the Knights of Light and Honour are marching this way, led by a champion. The way I see it, we've got two options: the first one is to go down fighting, but I'm going for the second. Or as someone much wiser than myself once said, 'If you can't beat 'em, join 'em.' But I intend to go one better on that second option, and make 'em think we were on their side all along. So what we need to do is this: Dwarves, give the place a thorough going-over, and burn anything that might tie us with the forces of Darkness. And if anyone asks you anything, you don't know a thing, you're just the cleaners. Guards and heralds, go out to the stables, cover yourselves in shit and start working the fields – the Knights of Light and Honour never harm humble peasants, so hide your weapons and chew straw until further notice."

She pointed at the undead hooded figures, "You lot, come with me."

In a cavern far below the castle, Ruella and the hooded figures discussed their plans. "So how much magic have we got left?" she asked.

"I still have one or two tricks left up my sleeve," said the one with the dangling eye. "Light the cauldron!"

While several of the hooded figures gathered around the cauldron, two of them ran back upstairs. Returning with several bolts of white cloth and a selection of needles and thread, they sat down in a corner and went to work.

Ruella watched in fascination as the creatures poured several brightly-coloured substances into the cauldron, all the time chanting in a strange forgotten tongue. Suddenly, they stopped. "It's ready," said the dangling eye.

"What's it for?" Ruella asked.

"It completely transforms your appearance."

Ruella made a face. "Do I have to drink it?"

"No. Sit down."

Ruella sat down next to the cauldron, surrounded by all but two of the hooded figures; they were still

busy sewing. The hooded figures took turns dipping a large wooden ladle into the cauldron and saturating Ruella's hair with its contents.

At the end of one hour, they dipped Ruella's head in water and handed her a mirror. She gasped in amazement; her appearance had been completely transformed. She was a blonde!

The two creatures who'd been sewing presented her with a flowing white dress; the rasping voice placed a selection of dainty little flowers in her hair, which had been twisted into golden ringlets. The dangling eye placed both hands on its hips. "If this kid ain't a picture of innocence, I don't know who is!"

"Those Knights of Light and Honour won't know what hit 'em," said the one surrounded by buzzing flies.

"Yeah, but all the Knights of Light and Honour have to do is take one look at you guys..."

"We'll be okay," said the rasping voice. "We haven't lost *all* our powers; we can still do rudimentary shape-changing."

"Shape-changing? You mean you guys don't have to look like that?"

"No, of course not," said one with live rats scurrying around its ribcage.

"So how come you all look like refugees from a cemetery?"

"Fashion," said the one with the buzzing flies.

Far below the castle, Ruella held a last-minute inspection. She walked up and down, examining row upon row of golden-haired maidens in white dresses. "You," she said, pointing at a maiden's chest, "what are you doing with those?"

"What do you think?" asked the maiden.

"They're bigger than mine. Get rid of them!"

"Ooh!"

"I said, get rid of them!"

The maiden scowled, but her breasts shrank to half the size.

"That's better," Ruella said. "Everybody got their rose petals?"

Each maiden held up a full pouch.

"Okay," said Ruella. "Let's do it."

The Knights of Light and Honour expected trouble when they crossed the border. They'd heard Tanalor was a dark and dangerous land, ruled by a an evil teenage sorceress and her undead minions. They were pleasantly surprised to find themselves greeted by scores of golden-haired maidens, blowing kisses and throwing rose petals.

The champion Glorioso pointed to the one he thought the fairest. "Come here, my pretty," he said, winking.

"I think he likes me," said the maiden with the rasping voice.

Molly Brown's previous *Interzone* stories include "Bad Timing" (issue 54) and "Angels of Darkness" (issue 64). An American by origin, she has lived in London for some years. Her list of past jobs is rather hilarious (see details in previous issues) and she now adds for our edification: "I've just sold a story to an anthology called *Bad Sex*, and among the many things in my shady past I was once the voice of a cartoon bear."

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Australian Landscapes

Paul Voermans interviewed by Steven Paulsen

Paul Voermans, like fellow Australian Greg Egan, has multiple sf books scheduled for publication by a major British publisher. In Voermans' case the first two are the novels *And Disregards the Rest* and *The Weird Colonial Boy* from Gollancz.

Interestingly, both writers had early book appearances with the Melbourne-based Norstrilia Press. With Voermans it came as a result of his participation in a three-week sf writers' workshop held in Melbourne in 1977. After the event George Turner edited the anthology: *The View From the Edge: A Workshop of Science Fiction Stories* (Norstrilia Press, 1977). Included was the young Paul Voermans' story, "The Broken Butterfly."

Upon finishing High School Voermans enrolled in a journalism course, but "dropped out" before the first lecture because he received an offer to attend a drama course at the Melbourne State College. After that he started a theatre company and worked in the theatre for about ten years. He has been a puppeteer and puppet-maker, a mime, theatre actor and had a lead role in an ABC children's television series *Trap, Winkle, and Box*. He has even worked as a butler and has exhibited some of his *Commedia dell'Arte* masks in the National Gallery of Victoria.

He left Australia in 1987 and travelled around Europe, living for a time in Spain where he studied acrobatics under Rogelio Rivel, before settling in England where he began to write again. Paul arrived back in Australia after the publication of his first book, *And Disregards the Rest*, in mid-1992. I caught up with him in October 1992 when he gave the following interview.

You attended the three week live-in sf writers' workshop conducted by George Turner, Chris Priest and Vonda McIntyre in 1977. How valuable was that experience and how much did it contribute to where you are now?

I gave up writing for ten years, more or less, after the workshop. Which was perhaps the best thing that could have happened.

I took away a better idea of what a writer's life can mean, or should mean.

For instance, the responsibility of praise can be crippling. George was too Australian, too aware of the problems of a career's dynamics to let on about anything but the work, at least to me. Chris was encouraging but characteristically ambivalent; I remember he said something about each new generation of sf writers having funny names, names like Voermans. Responding to a story that was an exercise in action, he said, "The worst thing about this is that you could pad it out and get it published as an Ace Double."

You have to have something to say. And being one to question the value of almost anything anyway, being of that age, I drifted into the theatre. I mean, I could have drifted into brick-laying except I'm not built for it. The theatre became a trade. I understand George Turner is very keen on writers taking up other trades, having something else to draw from in life, and that's where I have drawn from for *Disregards*. So in a way it set me straight. I could've responded to it badly, but people tend not to if they really want to write. It's too important to muck it up, isn't it?

Yes. Yet some have come away less than satisfied with the process.

Well, the impact's part of a long-term development, a social one as much as anything, and writers will take away what they want.

I understand you have been overseas for some time. Where did you write *And Disregards the Rest* and how did you set about selling it?

I began writing *Disregards* in Bristol when my wife got into the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School. It's expensive, so I had to chuck in acting. I bought myself a typewriter as a toy, really.

I was working in a mental hospital at one stage, and some of the novel I wrote there. At British Aerospace I had my own van and my work only took about four hours, so I wrote in the van. There was also toilet cleaning. I used to lock the toilets and sit on them and write. There were quite a number of jobs.

So I finished the first, second and third drafts in Bristol. I think it was the third draft I submitted to Gollancz...

it's difficult to judge these things, parts of it went six drafts or more. I wrote letters to Gollancz, Headline and Unwin Hyman. Malcolm Edwards was then at Gollancz, and he read a synopsis and then three chapters and he wanted to read the whole thing. He was the most responsive. Richard Evans was at Headline and he said, "I'll read the synopsis, but basically I'm only interested in reading finished novels. So he read the synopsis and said, "Oblique. I'd like to read it when it's finished." Unwin Hyman were very positive.

Now as it turned out, I sent a typescript to Unwin Hyman first. They returned it, possibly without reading it. I'm not sure – I didn't stick any pages together. By that time Malcolm Edwards had moved to Grafton and Richard Evans had moved to Gollancz, and I was sort of unsure about sending it out anyway. But Chris Priest asked me what I was looking for, and I said, "Criticism." Because there are very few professionals who have got the time for it. Chris and Leigh [Kennedy] didn't have time – they were in the middle of twins. "Send it off," said Chris. So I did and when Richard Evans said he was interested I told him I was happy just to hear what he thought. Basically Richard said, "Look, it's my business. If I discuss something it's with a view to buying it." Not that I needed any persuasion. So I guess it does pay to write letters.

I understand once you received an offer from Gollancz for the novel, you set about finding an agent for yourself. Do you think having an agent is important?

That was done on the advice of Chris Priest. At that stage, before the formal offer, they were talking about a two-book contract. I rang Chris and bubbled. And he said, "Right. Get an agent. Now." An agent will get you more, at least enough to cover their own fees, and they'll negotiate a better contract. It's hardly necessary with Gollancz because their contracts are extremely good.

You actually sold the first book and the second book independently as separate books rather than take a two-book deal.

Yes. Well, for a start my editor knew I was writing a second book by the time he read the first. Obviously everyone's career is different, but an agent can steer you away from things like a two-book contract when it's not suited and deliver a good one when it is.

Given that you offered thanks to your editor at the beginning of the book, how closely did you work with him?

Richard Evans brought what probably any good professional would bring: he is very experienced and very catholic in his tastes. Although we don't agree on everything I trust his criticism. I think that's immensely important. He wasn't about to impose himself. Having done some writing himself he knows how and why writers can get very precious. I'm not a very precious person because I worked in an improvisation troupe, so I'm used to dealing with people's opinions. Richard said, "You've got these plot problems," for example. And I said, "Well, A and B, I don't perceive as problems because of this." And he would say, "Fine, therefore that's a matter of clarity." And we'd go from there, I'd change the emphasis or the order or take it again from the top. Or he'd say, "You tend to do this a lot." And I'd come back with a way of countering the tendency. He was very pleased with the way I rewrote it.

You also acknowledged Chris Priest. Did he have much influence on the book at all?

Not directly. We're both interested in work about ordinary people that isn't soap opera. And we've had a lot of discussions about writing in general. He read *Disregards* at the proof stage. There was a lot of nail biting for me about it, and it was a big relief when he said he wasn't going to hang it in the toilet.

A number of people have commented on your sense of landscape, on the Australianness of imagery. In fact it was one of the things that struck me with *And Disregards the Rest*. Given that you wrote the book in England, do you think that the geographic distance and a longing for home may have contributed to that aspect of the book?

Yes, in a personal way the book is about homesickness. The treatment of the landscape is also a major theme, part of post-colonial adjustment and seeing or not seeing the landscape. Australia used to be seen in a European way, kangaroos as bent deer and so on. The Heidelberg School helped change that and the Republican and Green movements are changing it again. *Disregards* is science-fictional in that I'm looking at how we might see

things in the future, and what may go into that new vision. In some ways Kevin Gore is the man who begins to fit in to the future landscape.

I did quite a bit of research on details, because Kevin is a gardener by trade, although the settings are all places I've been to and had very good times in as you can see from the novel. The research is actually hard science as far as I'm concerned. One or two critics have seen my science as a bit dodgy, which is fair enough, but they haven't seen the landscape in the novel as anything more than setting. If you take speculative science and make it an excuse for the action then you needn't spend pages making it believable, beyond the gagging-on-unlikelihoods stage, which is what I tried to do. I mean the characters are the reason for the novel, as George Turner has recently said about it. And those characters interact with situations designed to discuss progress and perception. I don't question progress *per se*, but I do question rapid progress that sees us as owners of the landscape rather than part of it. It's a science-fiction novel more because of this than the stuff about aliens and time-tracks and telepathy, although those are the metaphors I've used to talk about the self and the other, fear of change and whatnot.

Just as an aside, that scene when Kevin's driving down the road and stripping away the facade of modern day life, recreating the natural environment in his mind: that was very strong, actually something that stayed with me after I'd finished the book. It's something that I've kind of played with while driving to work.

Australians especially have a real sense of what it was like. When you wander around in England it's hard to see what was oak forest, what was coppiced, or whatever. You get a sense in Australia that we're becoming, in spite of ourselves, more like the landscape. That it was planned as something of a road novel is a reflection of our kind of vision of the landscape.

You've obviously drawn on your experience as an actor to help create some of the characters and settings in *And Disregards the Rest*. Do you think your dramatic background has contributed to your skills as a writer in other ways?

Visualization and seeing the characters as a rounded whole both come out of acting. You don't see most of the scenery on stage, you have to make it real by implication. And with characters, it's very easy to say this character has this or that attribute, but to successfully imply it often comes from the description of a lot of irrelevant stuff.

Of course it has to be dramatically appropriate. So if somebody is for instance grief-stricken they obscurely think of a parrot that they kept when they were three. It provides the rhythm and personal symbology for their grief. People are quirky. You don't say everything and you don't make stock gestures towards characterization – there's too much of that that goes on.

There's a comment in George Turner's afterword to your story "The Broken Butterfly" from the 1977 sf writers' workshop book *The View From The Edge*...

He was talking about visualization?

Yeah... "I suggested to Paul, after I had decided to use the story, that part of his trouble was incomplete visualization of the scenes he wrote about – that he saw in his mind only the moving body or the immediate object in the focus of vision, whereas the writer must 'see' the total ambience of his characters, even though his final description uses only a few significant details for the hook on which the reader's attention is taken." I think that may have been true in 1977, but it is absolutely not true now: one of the real strengths of *And Disregards the Rest* was the visualization of the people and scenery.

I tend to chew at comments over a period of years. One problem with it is that it was a workshop story, and while other people are well able to write under pressure, I'm not. The other problem is that I was sixteen. (Laughs)

Do you know how the hardcover of *And Disregards the Rest* has been selling?

I got a postcard from Kim Stanley Robinson yesterday, and he mentioned as an aside that he'd seen it well distributed in England. It got good reviews there, almost uniformly, *Time Out* and *Interzone* liked it, which will have helped, but I haven't seen any figures yet.

How do you work? Do you have a set routine? Or do you just write when you can? And how do you write? Do you work with a computer or do you write longhand?

It all changes. Bruce Chatwin had those particular notebooks he bought from a Paris stationer, but I like whatever works at the time. I did write *And Disregards the Rest* in a series of notebooks with green covers, and in pencil with an eraser on the back, my delete button. Cut and paste was a clothes line in the lounge room. It's a lot of hard work translating pencil into a finished typescript. Changing from

one medium to another, though, gives you a fresh perspective that often can only be gained by putting the manuscript aside for six months. But if you put the manuscript aside and write it in pencil, then you've got what might be a bleak perspective, but at least it's objective. My second sf novel (*The Weird Colonial Boy*) was written in pencil as well, then stuck into the word processor. A pencil's more portable than a PC and you can write in brief snatches. It gives you a better sense of rhythms to re-enter each word, not just cut and paste. I typed one novel with my feet in an oven in a basement flat in Bristol.

Can you tell me a little bit about *The Weird Colonial Boy*?

It's a novel about a parallel Australia. It's... well, I hope it's funny. My editor said the critics who thought the plot of *And Disregards the Rest* was wacky would have to find new adjectives for this one. There are a lot of very Australian things in it, which the English will get but I'm not sure how the Americans will see them – although the only review I've had of *Disregards* in the U.S. has appreciated the humour. So I'm optimistic.

To a certain extent it's about science-fiction fans. I don't want to be insulting... well, I can't be insulting because I am a science-fiction fan, and I have been since I was quite young. *The Weird Colonial Boy* is affectionate, the way that Philip K. Dick's *Confessions of a Crap Artist* is.

It's also about dealing with evil people without taking on the attributes of evil to cope. The bad guys have the best rhetoric, you know? C.S. Lewis went on about it. Imagination necessarily transgresses moral boundaries, and we're in the position at the moment of realizing that you don't invalidate moral structures when it does transgress. In other words, if you get rid of God as the source of justice you needn't cripple yourself with uncertainty about right and wrong, it only puts the selfish people in charge. At the moment the world's evolving an international code on things you cannot do to people no matter what else we may disagree about. That's interesting to me. England's struggling with the bottom line right now, after Thatcher...

But what this has to do with naked yodelling Serbs leaping from trees onto people you'll have to find out for yourself.

What about short stories? Can we expect to see any short fiction from you? Or do you prefer to work on novel length projects?

I like short stories. I'll sit down and write a short story in a day just as



Paul Voermans

recreation. All writing is recreational for me, but short fiction is special because a lot of the pleasures you get as a science-fiction fan come from something short that sort of takes your mind apart. So I'd like to write a few of those, but I've got a drawer full in first draft, and I won't let them out of the house any more until they're up to about draft six. I like the novella too, but there isn't much of a market for them.

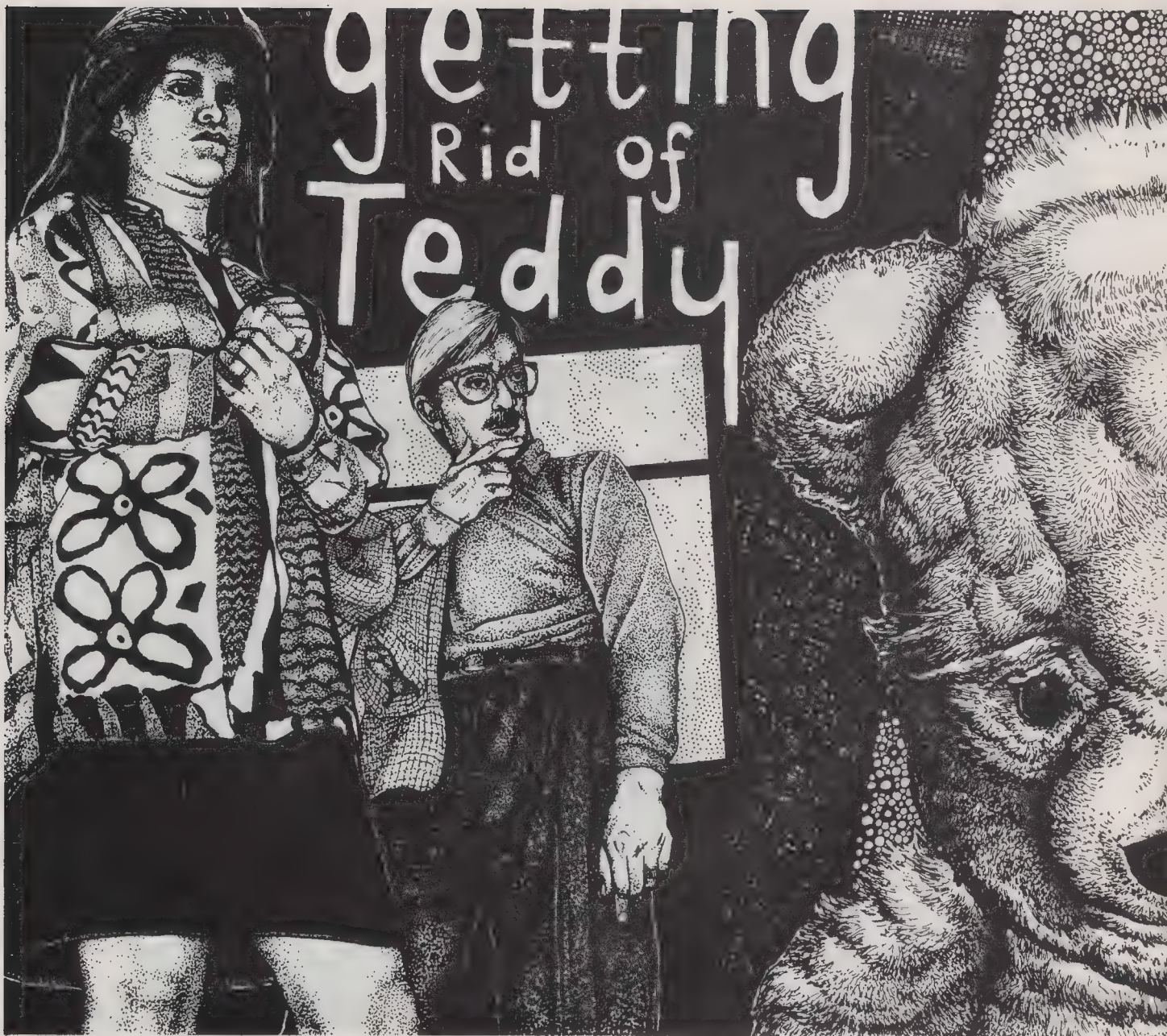
What else is in the pipeline, what are you going to do next?

I like to do as many things as I possibly can. I've got ideas for films – but then everyone does. There's an sf novel that I'm working on at the moment called *The Push*, as well as a mainstream one that's ready for revision now if I had enough energy to work on two simul-

taneously (laughs). There are heaps of ideas and the best ones bubble up. Although I don't go in for fantasy as much as sf I'd like to have a crack at it sometime. If Robert Heinlein can write crap fantasy – so can I (laughs).

So obviously we can look forward to a number of Paul Voermans books in the future.

Well, at the beginning of writing *Disregards* I told myself I'd give it about five years and see if I could get something published, and now I think of giving it five novels and see how I go. Although, you know, you get to an age when you realize you're not much good for anything else. So you might as well continue writing, especially if you enjoy it.



Of course Colin already knew what Adam's room looked like, but going in without his brother knowing was just the adventure that a rainy morning called for. Two pairs of eyes peeked round the door at the level of the door handle.

"Adam's not here," whispered the owner of the top pair. "Come on, Teddy."

Colin Deane and his teddy bear ventured in.

It was like Colin's own room, untidy despite their mother's best efforts, but plastic aircraft hung from the ceiling and there was a different taste in posters that reflected Adam's extra three years.

The clothes and shoes that lay about were two sizes too big for Colin, and he put his foot next to one of Adam's trainers and thought wistfully of the day he, too, would be seven. Colin wasn't sure how many years lay between four and seven, but he knew it was a long time to wait. But he wasn't here to look at the clothes.

"That's Adam's bed where he goes to bed, and that's Adam's radio, and...look, Teddy!" Colin's eyes settled on the most hallowed object in the house and his

tone changed to reverent awe. The plastic fighter gleamed in its new camouflage paint and Royal Air Force decals; Adam had spent hours putting it together with parental help and it was his pride and joy. "That's Adam's Pitsfire, and you go 'eeee-owwww dakka-dakka-dakka, take that, nasty,' and it flies about."

"Don't you dare touch my Spitfire!"

Colin spun round guiltily, still clutching Teddy. Adam advanced on him from the doorway, a blond cherub (which he got from his father) with a ferocious scowl.

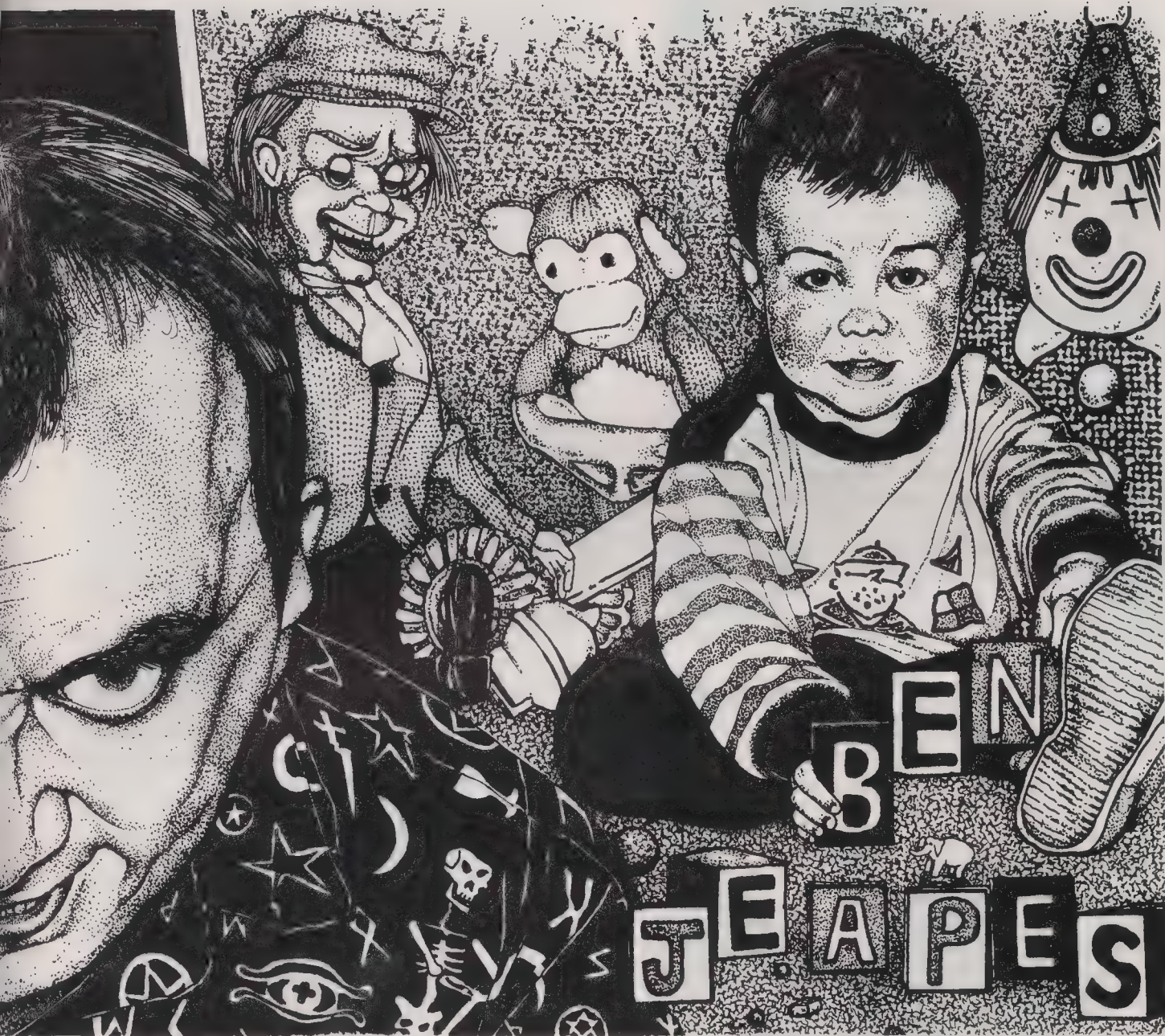
"Who said you could come in my room? What are you doing here?"

Adam measured 49 inches from top to toe and Colin cowered beneath every one of them.

"Teddy wanted to see," he quavered.

"Oh, that stupid Teddy!" Adam jeered. He wrenched Teddy from Colin's grasp. "Stupid, stupid Teddy."

"No!" Colin cried. Adam stalked across to the door and threw Teddy out on to the landing. Colin chased after him.



"I'm sorry, Teddy, I'm sorry," he wailed, picking Teddy up and cuddling him.

"And stop talking to it all the time, or you'll... you'll really be sorry!" Adam shouted, and slammed the door shut. Colin and Teddy were alone on the landing.

"Why should'n' I talk to Teddy?" Colin sobbed as he hugged Teddy to him. Teddy said he didn't mind.

It was that time of the week when Mummy – Elizabeth Deane – entertained. It was partly a task foisted on her by being the wife of a Church Elder and partly one she undertook out of a sense of duty – the newcomer to the flock (she had been a member for some ten years now, but still felt a newcomer), paying her way. She also enjoyed the occasional break from the boys' exclusive company and so every Wednesday the other women in the church who didn't have anything else to do met in the Deane house for coffee.

Elizabeth was in the middle of a conversation, of sorts, with Mrs May. It could be called a conversation, but the word "interrogation" did come to mind.

"I do think siblings are such a tower of strength, don't you, Elizabeth? Do you have any family? I mean, apart from here? Any brothers or sisters? I've heard your boys talk about their Uncle Bill –"

Boy, not boys, Elizabeth thought. It was Colin who doted on his Uncle Bill.

"I've got brothers and sisters, but I don't see them much," Elizabeth said, trying not to look as though the subject was painful. She didn't think the people here would approve of her family. "Not even Bill."

"Oh, dear, you ought to, you know!"

"I –"

"I mean, a family is such a tower –"

"Well, I have Michael," Elizabeth said. Everyone knew and liked her husband.

"Oh, Michael, yes!" Mrs May agreed, "such a tower of strength..."

Elizabeth was spared Mrs May listing all the other towers of strength that she could think of by the unmistakeable "oohs" and "aahs" that always heralded Colin's arrival at these meetings. Adam would be playing with the other children and the last

thing they would want was a four-year-old hanging around. Colin didn't know much about the world, but he knew when he was among friends.

"Hello, Colin!"

"Ah, look at his little sandals!"

"Who's your friend, Colin?"

Colin stood basking in the admiration, smiling shyly, with an arm wrapped in a loving stranglehold round Teddy's neck. Everyone but him knew he was showing off for all he was worth. Shyness eventually took over and he ran to Elizabeth and buried his face in her side. There were a few laughs and conversation went back to normal.

Elizabeth felt the tug on her skirt and looked down.

"Can I play a game?" Colin whispered.

"As long as it doesn't make a noise, dear."

"Can I play chets?" A chess set was permanently set out by the window: Michael Deane, the boys' father, was a fan of the game and hoped to teach it to both his sons. He had spent a lot of the previous Sunday evening teaching Adam, with Colin observing closely.

"Who will you play chets with, dear?"

"Teddy."

Elizabeth shrugged and several people chuckled.

"Okay," Elizabeth said, and turned back to the guests to talk about the slide show presentation on Africa that was looming on the church's social calendar.

Colin grabbed the chess set with one hand; the board folded and the pieces scattered.

"Oh, Teddy, you are so cumsee." A fair imitation of his father; Elizabeth half heard it and smiled to herself.

Colin put the board down on the floor and sat Teddy the other side of it. He shut his eyes for a moment, then opened them and quickly repositioned the pieces as they should be.

"Black queen on black, white queen on white, Teddy," he said. He curled his fingers up into fists and held his hands out to Teddy. "Which one do you want to be?" Teddy apparently chose the hand with the black pawn, even though Colin had forgotten to put a pawn in either hand at all. "Okay, I'm white so I go first. Now, you always move a pawn first and you can move them two squares on their first go. I'll move this pawn here to free the bishop—"

Some of the guests seemed quite impressed; Colin's words were sinking into Elizabeth's consciousness over the general chatter and she was trying not to stare at him. Colin's pronunciation was still imperfect but he was talking like someone far older.

"One, two, and one to the side. See, Teddy? I've got my knights and my bishops out to do the attacking—"

Elizabeth had come over to watch the game. Colin was making his own moves and moving the pieces for Teddy without any hesitation. Sometimes he moved a piece for Teddy, then corrected Teddy out loud and repositioned it.

This game, Elizabeth had finally realized, was an exact replay, minus the pauses, of the game Michael had played with Adam, complete with Michael's commentary. The only thing missing was what Adam had said; Teddy was silently taking Adam's part.

"Why don't you move this pawn, dear?" she said as an experiment. Colin looked up crossly.

"No, Mummy, I move *this*, and Teddy moves *this*, and I move *this*—"

"And why's that, dear?"

"'Cos Teddy says!" There were indulgent chuckles from the guests and Elizabeth decided the best she could do was divert attention altogether. The game was over five minutes later.

"Shall we play another, Te—"

"Colin, dear, why don't you play in the garden? Look, it's stopped raining."

Colin's ephemeral attention span evaporated at once.

"Okay," he said happily. He grabbed Teddy and ran out, leaving Elizabeth wondering what else Teddy told him. Teddy told Colin a lot of things. When the guests had gone he told him Adam was about to join him in the garden, so Colin looked out warily for his big brother. Adam was ashamed of his earlier temper and offered to let Colin play with him and his Muta-bots. They carried on the game after lunch and spent the afternoon happily together; the rain held off and Teddy was relegated to the sidelines.

Later he told Colin that dinner was almost ready, and Colin had his hands properly washed just as Mummy called him. Mummy wouldn't allow Teddy in the bath with him but Teddy was waiting for him afterwards, nestling against his pillow. Mummy kissed him goodnight and he fell asleep with Teddy cuddled up close to him.

Teddy was under standing orders to wake Colin up when his father got home, so Michael would have no excuse for not coming up and giving him a goodnight kiss. Michael Deane thought Colin was a very light sleeper but he always obliged; he felt guilty at having to work so long each day to pay the mortgage, which meant he only saw his sons on weekdays for a few snatched minutes in the morning. The tall, fair haired figure appearing silhouetted against the hall light in Colin's doorway was always a highlight of the day for Colin. It reminded him of a picture of Jesus in church, and he knew that was good.

Michael always spent a quite unreasonable time talking to Elizabeth first, and Teddy told Colin what they were saying.

"How was today, love?"

"Oh, the children only had one fight. I can't complain."

Michael laughed.

"What was it this time?"

"Colin went into Adam's room without telling him."

"Oh no! Call the Security Council! Send an expeditionary force—"

As usual, long words he didn't understand killed Colin's interest and Teddy had to wake him up again before Michael came in for the kiss.

Later Elizabeth put in a surprise appearance herself, but Teddy did not wake Colin because he had not been told to. Elizabeth looked down at the sleeping child and felt a tight knot in her innards.

"Can you read my mind, Teddy?" she thought. Teddy's eyes stared blankly at the ceiling. Colin mumbled in his sleep and half turned over, shifting Teddy's position; now Teddy stared blankly at her. She took a step sideways, out of the line of Teddy's gaze.

How long had it been going on? Teddy had been a first birthday present and Colin had been talking to

him for as long as he had been able to talk at all, but for how long had Teddy been answering back? She would never get an answer, knowing Colin's sense of time, but she imagined it hadn't been too long. Perhaps the last few months, maybe even weeks. Surely she would have picked up a clue earlier than today, if it had been any longer.

"Daddy will blow his top if I tell him, Colin," she thought again. "That's what you get for marrying into another religion." She knelt down and kissed Colin's soft cheek. "And I could still be imagining it all, couldn't I? I've still not got any real proof."

But she knew, deep down, that she had all the proof she needed. Sceptics need a lot of proof and a lot of convincing. Believers need a lot less.

It was the middle of the week and Colin was playing hide-and-seek with Teddy in the living room; which is to say, he hid Teddy and then sought him. To make the game less one-sided he would look in several places where Teddy wasn't before finally tracking him down with a cry of triumph.

Elizabeth wasn't sure what to expect. Would Teddy scurry across the floor and hide somewhere else? She doubted it... at least, not if Colin didn't want it to happen.

She sat down to watch. Colin located Teddy behind the chair and shouted, "got you!"

"Colin, darling, can you come here?" Elizabeth asked. Colin obediently toddled over to her, still clutching Teddy, and she lifted him up on to her lap.

"Oof. Heavy boy." Colin looked at her expectantly. Well, how should she start? Colin, darling, you're a witch, and Teddy's your familiar...

"Darling, can I ask you about Teddy?"

"Sure," Colin said. Elizabeth took a breath.

"Darling, does Teddy talk to you a lot?"

Colin shrugged.

"He does if I want."

"And what does he tell you?"

"What I ask him."

"Can he tell you... where Adam is now?"

"He's shy, Mummy," Colin said.

"Can you ask him very, very nicely? Just for me?"

"Where's Adam, Teddy?" Colin said. Then, "He's in the bathroom, going wee-wee."

"Oh. Well, um, I don't think Teddy should look at Adam, then."

"Okay," Colin said. Upstairs, the toilet flushed. Elizabeth thought about what to ask next.

"Can Teddy move, dear?" she asked brightly. Colin made Teddy wave at her and Elizabeth sighed. "Can he move without you holding his arm, Colin?" she said. Colin looked at her with a sad patience.

"Teddies can't, Mummy," he said slowly, and Elizabeth almost laughed. What had she expected? Movement, from a cloth bag full of acrylic stuffing?

"So is that all Teddy can do, darling? Does he just tell you things?" Elizabeth said. Colin wriggled, anxious to get off Elizabeth's lap and go back to his game.

"Yes."

Elizabeth let him slide down and sighed. It might actually be all right. It actually might.



A short while later she heard the raised voices. She rolled her eyes to the ceiling and went to investigate. The boys stopped bickering the moment she appeared and she coaxed the story out of them.

Adam had also staked a claim to the living room and Colin was still playing hide-and-seek with Teddy. This was incompatible with Adam's vision of the living room as the bridge of a starship.

"All right, then," Elizabeth said, "I'll split the room in two. Adam can have all of this bit, up to this line, and Colin can have all of this bit. Right? Now, no more arguing. Mummy's trying to work."

She left, thinking that Solomon couldn't have done it better.

She didn't see the boys go back to their respective games, pointedly ignoring each other. Colin hid Teddy behind one of the chairs, then stood in the middle of his half with his eyes shut, counting to five. Adam positioned his plastic soldiers around the room in lieu of the rest of the bridge crew and sat on the sofa. He pretended that the picture over the fireplace was the viewscreen and gave orders for warp factor seven.

"...five! Coming!" Colin called.

"Warp factor seven, engage," Adam repeated, a bit louder.

"Where are you, Teddy? Where are you?" Colin said, peering behind the other chair.

"Shut up, Colin. Shields on full."

"I'm in my half," Colin said stubbornly. "Are you here, Teddy?" He peered behind the bookcase.

"Your stupid Teddy's behind the chair," Adam said. Colin ignored him. "I said, your stupid Teddy's behind the chair."

"Don't spoil it!"

"It's a stupid game!"

"Spoilsport!"

"Look!" Adam crossed into Colin's half of the room and pulled Teddy out. "Here it is, stupid old Teddy."

"Give!" Colin shouted, jumping up and trying to grab Teddy. Adam held Teddy above his head while Colin kept jumping.

"Please, Adam!" Colin wailed.

"Pees, A-dum," Adam mimicked. He giggled and drop kicked Teddy across the room...

Elizabeth tore into the room, panting. Her legs had started carrying her there the moment she had heard the screams. This wasn't just one boy tormenting the other. These screams had real, naked terror in them.

Teddy lay face down in the middle of the floor and the brothers sat in opposite corners of the room. Colin was sitting, legs straight out in front of him, head tilted to the ceiling and bawling.

Adam cowered in his corner, curled up into a ball. He was doing the screaming. He screamed even more when she touched him and recoiled from her. His face was white and his eyes were wide and staring. He was terrified.

"Adam, darling, it's me, Mummy," she soothed. Adam stopped screaming but still stared. "Adam, whatever happened?"

"He attacked me!" Adam howled, and flung his arms around her. "Mummy, he attacked me!"

"Oh, darling, I'm sure Colin—"

"Teddy!" Adam screamed.

Later, when Elizabeth was sitting on the sofa with an arm around either boy and with Teddy a safe distance away on the floor, Adam was more coherent.

"He turned into a thing," he said, in between his sobs, "a horrible, horrible, thing, with claws and... and... and it came at me, and..."

"He was being horrid," Colin sobbed. "He kicked Teddy."

An illusion? Or had Teddy really changed?

"But did Teddy hurt you, darling?" Elizabeth asked. No answer. "Darling?" she repeated.

"Not really," Adam said sulkily. Then, "But it happened, Mummy! It really did! I saw a horrid thing..."

"I know, darling, I know," Elizabeth said gently.

"You don't believe me," Adam mumbled.

Oh, I do, I do.

She was going to have to lie to her son. She was going to have to convince Adam that it hadn't happened, and do so before Michael came home so that Adam wouldn't mention it. He was old enough not to believe it himself, really, and perhaps he would come to think he had imagined it. Which was probably true.

But she would still be lying.

But later? Supposing Colin lost his temper again? Would it get worse?

The glory of Christ... She knew all about that. The church taught that the gifts and talents of its members should be used to serve others, as Christ had done. But if Colin, through Teddy, could conjure up an image so powerful as to scare the living daylights out of his brother...

You're on probation, Teddy, she thought. Just step over the line, one more time, one tiny step...

Though she wasn't sure what she would do. What she could do.

"Why've we got to go to church?" Adam scowled. "It's boring."

"No it's not, dear," Elizabeth said firmly, straightening his tie. "And you and Colin can see all your friends in Sunday School." Colin scuttled into the room with Teddy in tow, to ask the usual question.

"Can Teddy come?"

"Afraid not, darling."

"Told you, Teddy. Teddies don't go to church."

And this one wouldn't be very welcome if he did, Elizabeth thought glumly.

"I knew it would be boring," Adam muttered from the back seat on the way home.

Both boys had been siphoned off to Sunday School after the first hymn, as usual, and Elizabeth felt it was just as well.

She had gone through torment and Michael had been uncomfortable for her sake, knowing her background. Ritual abuse of children was in the news as the latest media bandwagon: the newspapers were full of horror stories about children allegedly dragged into covens, forced to drink blood, sexually abused for the benefit of the forces of darkness... Today the minister had decided to emphasize the party line on it. His text: "thou shalt not suffer a witch to live."

"I like Miss Day," Colin ventured.

"That's 'cos you're stupid!". Colin retreated in hurt silence.

"Now, boys," said Michael from the front. "What did you talk about, Colin?"

"Miss Day told us about Jonah and the whale."

"That's exciting, isn't it?" said Elizabeth.

"I want to talk about witches like you did," Adam muttered.

"Witches," Colin said, for no real reason, and began to sing. "Witchy, witchy, witchy, witchy..."

"Who said we were talking about witches, Adam?" Michael asked.

"John's dad."

"Thanks, John's dad," Michael muttered.

"Uncle Bill's a witch," Colin said suddenly. The car swerved slightly.

"Whatever gave you that idea?" Michael said sharply, and he saw the alarmed look on Colin's face in the mirror. "Who said that, Colin?" he asked more gently, and Elizabeth knew, knew, without a shadow of doubt, what Colin's answer would be and interrupted before he had finished the first syllable.

"Te—"

"Uncle Bill has some funny ideas, darling," Elizabeth said quickly. "He doesn't understand about the church like we do. That's right, isn't it?"

"Some funny ideas. That's all," Michael agreed.

"Uncle Bill's nice," Colin insisted.

"'Course he is, he gave you your stupid Teddy, didn't he?" Adam said. Elizabeth almost gasped. Of course he had! Uncle Bill. Why, that...

The boys were chasing each other around the park over the damp grass, squealing happily at the top of their voices. The idea of the game seemed to be that they should play tag and Colin should chase Adam but when he caught him it didn't actually count. Colin didn't seem to mind.

Teddy was safely back at home. Colin always asked if Teddy could come when they went out, and permission was always refused. Elizabeth didn't think she could stand the results if Teddy got dropped in a muddy puddle.

Elizabeth sat on one of the park benches. She watched the man sitting at the other end of the bench throw a stick for his dog, a red setter. The dog bounded after it, ears and tail flapping.

"The moon shines brightly over Moscow," the man said ominously. He had a pleasant face and was slightly taller and slightly younger than her.

"I'm onto you, Bill," Elizabeth said.

"Well, and hello to you to, Big Sis," the man said. The dog trotted up to them with the stick in its mouth. It dropped the stick at Elizabeth's feet and barked expectantly.

"Hey, gormless! How am I meant to have a clandestine rendezvous when you go and give it away?" Bill shouted.

"Oh, Bill, please," Elizabeth said. The man looked at her and grinned.

How she loved that grin. Bill alone of the Family had known just how unhappy she had been. To be in the Family and not possess the Craft, not to the slightest degree... worse than that. To be the *eldest child*, the heir apparent to a line unbroken for centuries, and be *Craftless*... Bill had never had any

problems that way, but he had empathy and was the closest to her in age. Grandma had never understood, and her bad temper and belief in the supernatural had scared Elizabeth witless. It didn't help that things actually did go bump in the night in their household. She had fled as soon as she could and been disinherited as a result.

To compound her crime, she had married a Christian. She had met Michael at college and his faith had attracted her right from the start. Here was she, timid and riddled with superstition, and there was he, secure and confident in the protection of his God before whom all other powers trembled. It was no contest and she had embraced that protection willingly.

Bill had been the only one of her relatives to come to the wedding, and he had had to lie about his whereabouts that day to the rest of the Family. And he had promised. He had been unwilling, he had made no secret of his disagreement, but he had promised that her children would never learn about the Craft from him.

"Well, you started it," he said. "'Meet me in the park, the bench by the bandstand'... very John Le Carré. When do we feed the ducks?"

Elizabeth stuck to her agenda.

"Bill, don't you remember the agreement? How could you do it?"

Bill looked at her blankly.

"Could I what?"

"You gave Teddy to Colin!"

Bill frowned, trying to remember.

"Oh, that. Well, yes, so what? Isn't an uncle allowed to be nice to his nephews? How does giving teddy bears constitute teaching the boys about the Craft?" He paused, thinking. "Besides, I gave one to Adam as well, when he was small."

"I know. He shoots his air rifle at it."

"Really?" Bill grinned widely. "That's my boy!"

"My boy. But..." For the first time Elizabeth began to doubt. "It doesn't bother you?"

"Of course not!" Now Bill was frowning again. "Look, Sis, what is it?"

Elizabeth paused, suddenly feeling foolish. Maybe... no. How could she have thought it of her brother? Of course Teddy wasn't a Trojan Horse for the Craft. Teddy had been an innocent present from a loving uncle.

"How are you, Bill?" she said, changing the subject. Bill's expression indicated that he intended to return to the subject in due course, but for now he let her get away with it.

"Me? I'm trying to be good. I blotted my copybook in a big way..."

"As much as me?" Elizabeth said ironically.

"No way! But I've been doing the rounds, you see, trying to get some research going... like, Edinburgh has quite a neat little parapsychology department, for instance, and Grandma flipped her lid when I approached them. She still insists the Craft is boring old magic. But, I recanted." He looked suitably repentant. "Fortunately the old bat hasn't grasped the idea of PO boxes yet and I've had quite a neat little correspondence going, so as soon as she snuffs it, Sis, as soon as and I'm in charge, things'll change. Drastically. The s-word will be mentioned under our roof with impunity and you'll be welcomed back."

"The s-word?"

"Science!" Bill said dramatically. "Meanwhile, Sis, how's the enemy camp?"

"It's...I still find it different. But I'm very happy, Bill, very happy."

"The lads look happy too."

"They are."

Bill's dog put his head on Elizabeth's lap and looked up at her hopefully. She ruffled his ears for him without thinking, then remembered and recoiled. "Is this your latest?"

"Yeah, he's great," Bill said warmly. "Old Graymalkin."

"Bill!"

"Sorry, did I say Graymalkin? I meant Rufus. He's the best yet. Just watch. Hey, stupid, look! Look stick! Fetch!"

The stick had been lying at his feet. Before Rufus's gaze it rose slowly into the air and then suddenly flew off. Rufus bounded after it.

"I'm impressed," Elizabeth said, without putting her heart into it.

"It's all a matter of love, Sis. I love Rufus like no other, so he works extra well for me." Bill looked at her askance, shaking his head. "Still don't like it, do you?"

"The church says it's wrong," Elizabeth said dogmatically. "It's Satanic."

"I know a lot of witches and a couple of Satanists who would take exception to that."

"Oh...Bill, does a familiar have to be an animal?" There was such strain in her voice that Bill looked at her oddly.

"This isn't hypothetical, is it?"

"No. No, it isn't."

"Uh huh. Well...I've never known one that isn't, Sis. Why do you...?" A look of revelation dawned like a sunrise on Bill's face, as everything suddenly fell into place. "Not Teddy?"

"Right."

Bill whistled.

"Well, who'd have thought it? Tell me more, Sis."

So Elizabeth told him.

"...I mean, I've always carefully kept the house free of pets, I'm not stupid, but..." And she told him all about Teddy – everything that she knew. "I mean, Colin knows things, and can do things, and the other day..." She described the scene in the living room with the two boys. Bill seemed awe-struck.

"And he uses his teddy bear to focus? Wowee, that little boy has got it bad."

"But, talking to him?"

"It could seem that way to a four-year-old. Sometimes I could swear Rufus talks to me, but it's just my own thoughts bouncing off him."

"So how did it happen?"

"How?" Bill shrugged. "Who does Colin love more than anything, Sis?" He saw the answer in her face. "And I know it ought to be an animal because it always has been, but..." He shrugged again. "I think kids act on the bumble bee principle. If no one tells 'em it's impossible, they don't realize they can't do it. And from the sound of it...you know, I think little Colin could wipe the floor with Grandma, when he's older." He looked thoughtfully over at the playing boys and Elizabeth knew he wasn't just studying

them with his eyes. "Maybe he's the one who'll finally make us respectable and get the world to accept psionics as a scientific fact."

"So what can I do?" Elizabeth said in desperation.

"Easy. Tell Michael everything. Tell him that as well as the hair and the eyes that he's got off you, Colin has inherited a perfectly natural paranormal power..."

"No! I mean, no. I know Michael. I love him deeply but he'll never accept that his son is like...like he knows my mother was. Like he knows you are."

"Then the answer is obvious," Bill said, slowly. "Get rid of Teddy."

Elizabeth finally decided.

"I will," she said. "It's the only thing I can do."

Bill shook his head, looking at the boys again.

"It won't do you a bit of good, you know. Not if he's as powerful as I think. He'll find something else."

"And I'll stop him!" Elizabeth snapped. "I'll...Bill, get this into your head, I will not let my boy grow up as a witch!"

The tension between them, which had begun to thaw as they spoke, was now crystallized in the air around them. They were on opposite sides of a vast gulf and always would be.

"As you will," Bill said tonelessly. "But in fourteen years' time he'll be an adult and, if he asks, I'll do everything I can to help him."

His face promptly lost its seriousness, which it never held for more than a few seconds, and he passed her a folded bank note. "Here, Sis. Buy the boys an ice cream or two from their Unca Will-yum, will you?"

How, how on earth do you get rid of your son's teddy bear without him suspecting? The perfect murder must be easier to plan.

It had to be permanent, irreversible. She couldn't just hide him somewhere – if Colin could use Teddy at a distance he would soon track Teddy down. Teddy had to be so obviously disposed of that Colin would know he was gone, and wouldn't try and get in touch again.

But might not Teddy alert Colin to her planned treachery in the first place? No, probably not. Colin had to tell Teddy what to do, and why would Colin suspect his own mother of turning traitor against him?

There was a building site down the road. Drop Teddy into one of the concrete mixers? Visions of newspaper headlines swam in front of her and she half-smiled: *Teddy Bear in Gangland Slaying Horror*.

Colin started school in another month. Could she wait until then and burn Teddy while he was away?

But how could she explain it? Sorry, darling, I had Teddy in the garden with me when I had a bonfire and he slipped...

The answer came one typically rainy day.

The day was representative of a wet summer. Elizabeth was in the kitchen, slowly stirring a saucepan full of soup without looking at it.

It could work. She would have to be careful, distract Colin for just a moment...it could be done.

The soup began to fizzle and she realized she had stopped stirring, lost in thought. It would be burnt at the bottom.

"Damn!" she said out loud, the strongest word she had said for years. She bit her tongue. *Take it easy, Elizabeth.*

She looked out of the window at the grey day, past the drops on the glass at the faint drizzle that could only be seen against the darker bushes at the end of the garden. The rain really had lightened and would stop soon. She could put the plan into action, if she chose.

Could she do it, now it came to the crunch? Could she really take such a painful step?

"Lunchtime, boys," she called. Colin obediently appeared a moment later. She saw Adam head past the kitchen door towards the stairs.

"Lunch, Adam," she repeated.

"I'll just —"

"Now, Adam!" she snapped, before she could catch herself. Adam paused, looked at her face and decided whatever he was about to do could wait.

"Yes, Mummy," he said meekly, and followed Colin to the table.

Elizabeth took a breath to ask if they had both washed their hands, then realized that of course Adam had been heading for the bathroom to do just that. She let the breath out again and turned to stove with her face burning. *Calm down, calm down.*

She set the bowls of soup out on the table and sat down herself, making a triangle around the table with the boys at the other points. All she could see was Colin's happily innocent face as he sipped away; all she could do was mentally contrast it with the sorrow that she knew would be there if her plan went through. *Her son, the witch.* That bolstered her a bit.

"Do you like your soup, dear?" she said.

"It's very nice," Colin said politely.

"Would Teddy like some?" Adam taunted and Elizabeth almost slapped him.

"Adam!" She could do without the boys bickering at this moment. Colin looked comically haughty.

"Don't be dickless," he said.

"Colin!" Without thinking, Elizabeth had reached across and slapped his wrist. His spoon fell into the soup and he stared at her, horrified.

"Where did you learn that word?" Elizabeth demanded. "Where did you learn that word?"

Colin's lips trembled.

"Where?" Elizabeth repeated. Colin said something soundlessly.

"What?"

"You said!" Colin blurted, and finally burst into tears and fled from the table.

Elizabeth threw down her own spoon and followed the sobbing. She found Colin in the living room, hugging Teddy to him.

Calm, calm, calm.

"Colin, dear," she said gently, gently but firmly, sitting down next to him. "I've never said that word."

"Did," Colin said. "Dickless."

"When?"

"You know!"

It was probably sometime today, if at all. Colin would never hang onto a new word for long without saying it out loud. Elizabeth patiently ran through the things she had said, and then she had it. Practically the first thing. She had gone in to wake Colin up; Colin had said he wanted to stay in bed forever



because it was so nice and warm; she had said, don't be –

She sighed and took him into her arms.

"Ri-dic-u-lous, dear," she said kindly. "I'm very sorry I slapped you but you should learn to say it properly, you know. Let's go back to lunch, shall we?"

"Dickless," Colin mumbled.

"Ridic –"

"Dickless!" Colin shouted. "Dickless! Dickless! Dickless!"

That did it. Overt disobedience –

And then Elizabeth realized Colin hadn't said anything. She had heard the words in her head but his lips hadn't moved. He had stared defiantly at her and he had hugged Teddy just a bit harder. That was all.

She shuddered and looked out of the window. The rain had stopped completely. Looking back at Colin, it was all she could do to smile at him and keep holding him. Intensive Cuddle Therapy was called for.

"Well, cheer up and later we'll go for a nice walk," she suggested.

"Don't want to," said Adam after lunch. He had been most vocal in his complaints about having to stay in.

"Yes you do, dear. We can get some fresh air."

They put on their coats and pulled on their boots.

"Can Teddy come?" Colin asked, as he usually did.

"Yes, why not, darling? Bring him." Adam shot her a surprised look, which changed to veiled disgust at parental hypocrisy.

Sure enough, Adam lost his dislike of the outdoors once they were out. They headed towards the common and the boys chased each other through the puddles, throwing up miniature fountains and squealing with laughter. This was how it should be between the brothers, Elizabeth thought. It was a moment to hold in her memory forever, before what she was going to do ruined it.

"Colin, shall I hold Teddy? He'll get wet."

"Okay," Colin said. He handed Teddy over and went back to the game. Elizabeth held the stuffed toy and felt like Judas pursing his lips.

The common was split in two by the river and a pedestrian bridge linked the two halves.

"Why don't we go to the bridge and play Poohsticks?" she said. Winnie the Pooh's greatest contribution to Western civilization.

"Oh, yes!" they chorused.

The river was swollen and dangerously close to its banks. The water rushed by them at speed and notices had been put up warning pedestrians to stay well away from the edge. Even the ducks had given up against the current and were nowhere to be seen.

They collected some twigs and went up onto the bridge. Elizabeth was still holding Teddy.

"Careful, boys," she said as they leaned over the upstream rail. "Don't want to fall in." They held their twigs out over the water. "Ready, steady, go."

They dropped their twigs and hurried to the other side of the bridge.

"That's mine!" Colin cried as his twig emerged in the current.

"And mine!"

"A draw," said Elizabeth diplomatically. "Let's go again."

They went again. Colin's twig was the clear winner.

"Can we play it the other way?" Colin asked.

"'Course not, stupid," Adam said.

"Now, now, Adam. How about a third time?"

Again they held their twigs out.

"Ready..." said Elizabeth. The boys were staring eagerly at the water. She took a deep breath. "Steady..."

With a sob and a flick of the wrist she sent Teddy over the rail.

"Look out!" she called.

Teddy hit the water and spun round, floating face down. Colin stood, gaping, too shocked to howl.

"Oh no! Quick, catch Teddy!" Elizabeth cried, and they ran down to the bank. Teddy was a dot in the water. He bumped into a branch that stuck out from the bank and for a moment Elizabeth thought they might actually rescue him, but then he floated free again.

Sink, damn you, sink! Elizabeth was thinking, even as she was shouting encouragement. Colin had started wailing and the sound tore at her. Adam had found a long stick and was holding it out to catch Teddy, but it was several feet too short.

Then, finally, Teddy went under and didn't come up again.

And Colin was screaming.

Oh, it was heartbreaking. Colin could not be consoled. A child's sorrow, final and desperate, because Colin only knew how to live for the present and could not conceive of a time to come when all this would have passed and he would have something else to love. The worst bereavement. Back at the house he sat on Elizabeth's lap with his arms round her neck and cried his heart out, and every sob was a knife in Elizabeth's heart.

Colin was still crying when Michael came home and this added to Elizabeth's suffering. She had to present the official version, the lie, to Michael, her husband. She knew that Michael was cross with her for taking Teddy on the walk in the first place, but was too nice to say so.

The next day Colin was listless. His face was white and he was running a temperature. Elizabeth began to worry. Had she bitten off more than she could chew? She put him to bed. Later she bought him a cup of cocoa and found him half delirious; he was tossing and turning and muttering about Teddy coming back.

She had a horrid feeling that she knew what was happening. He was trying to recall Teddy, physically, dredging him up from the river by the power of his mind. He was spending all his strength on it, but didn't know it and would not stop until all his strength was gone.

(Could he do it, though? Would he do it? She prayed not.)

The doctor came in and was bemused. He prescribed some foul-tasting stuff that Colin hated and went away.

When Michael came home on the third day he found Elizabeth asleep in a chair beside Colin's bed.

"Come to bed," he said gently. "We can't do anything. And look at him. He might be getting better."

He might have been. He was lying still and breathing normally, which meant nothing. It could be recovery, it could be a relapse.

When Elizabeth went into Colin's room the next morning she was afraid to draw the curtains for what she might see. She reached out for them –

They flew apart of their own accord, hissing on their runners. She stepped backwards with a startled shout and the end of Colin's bed caught the back of her legs. She sat down with a bump. Colin was too short for her to have sat on him, she thought automatically, he only came half way down the bed...

Colin.

Her son was sitting up, smiling beatifically at her. The colour was back in his cheeks and he looked his usual bubbly self.

"Hello, Mummy," he said. He still sounded a bit sleepy, but was clearly pleased with himself.

"Co-Colin..." She gestured at the curtains. "Did you do that?"

He caught her lack of enthusiasm and his smile dimmed.

"Didn't you want me to?" he said anxiously.

"How did you?" Elizabeth asked, dreading the answer, and Colin's smile returned to its full innocent brilliance.

"I asked Teddy. Teddy's come back, Mummy."

"What?" Elizabeth looked round, expecting to see a small, sodden, dripping mass somewhere, perhaps lurching Karloff-like towards her and trailing weeds. Teddy was nowhere to be seen. "Um, where is he, dear?"

"Here," Colin said, beaming. He tapped his head. "Teddy's here, Mummy, and he says he's all right."

He used an expression he had learned from her. "That's nice, isn't it?"

Somehow Elizabeth returned to her own room, implications buzzing about in her mind. This was too big for her, but then, she should never have tried to tackle it on her own. Now she was going to have to swallow her pride.

Michael was awake too.

"How is he, love?" he asked.

"He's better."

"Wonderful! Isn't that great?"

He frowned up at her, unable to understand why she wasn't rejoicing too. She sat down by him and took a hand and squeezed it. She wasn't the only one who was going to have to swallow pride.

"Michael, darling, we've got to talk..."

Ben Jeapes, who lives in Abingdon, Oxfordshire, is the managing editor of *Expert Systems: The International Journal of Knowledge Engineering and Neural Networks* as well as copy editor of three other scientific journals. The above is his fourth story to be published and his third for us.

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Yesterday's Bestsellers, 16: Lewis Carroll's *Alice Books* by Brian Stableford

Lewis Carroll's two books about the dream-adventures of Alice are among the most successful children's books of all time. Like many children's classics they owe this status to their popularity with adults rather than any uniquely powerful appeal to their intended end-users, but there is no doubt that they do hold and preserve – even nowadays, more than a hundred years after they were written – a fascination which is capable of captivating many young readers. The two books have made a copious contribution to that amorphous common heritage of literary reference which even people who have never read the relevant works find perfectly familiar. Almost everyone would understand a conversational reference to a Mad Hatter's Tea-Party, or the import of such quotations as "Curiouser and curiouser," "Sentence first – verdict afterwards" and "Jam yesterday and jam tomorrow – but never jam today."

The continuing popularity of the Alice books has run in parallel with a considerable academic industry, whose bulk and variety far outstrips the academic interest taken in any other children's books. This is mostly due to the nature of the texts; their bizarre incidents readily lend themselves to further exploration and explanation. Martin Gardner's *The Annotated Alice* (1960), which dutifully lays out the original versions of all the rhymes which Carroll parodied and carefully unfolds the conundrums and verbal tricks which pepper the narratives, is a fascinating extrapolation of the originals. Much additional speculation has, however, been engendered by post-Freudian suspicions about the Reverend Dodgson's relationships with the children he befriended – suspicions which have fed gluttonously on the fact that his keen interest in the emergent craft of photography led him to take many photographs of children, a few of which were nude studies. Although it is universally accepted that the Reverend Dodgson was entirely innocent of any physical impropriety, the dubious advantage of theoretical hindsight has led many commentators to wonder about secret feelings which he might have had or

subconscious desires which he might have sublimated in the writing of the books. Such fantasies have coloured the image of the books in spite of the fact that there is little material in the texts which readily lends itself to Freudian decoding.

Charles Lutwidge Dodgson was born in 1832 in a Cheshire village where his father was a curate. He was the third of eleven children, but was the eldest son; his two older siblings were both sisters, as were the next two born after him, and it is not entirely surprising that he was always comfortable in the company of young girls. A childhood fever left him deaf in one ear and he had a stammer which stayed with him all his life, at least in adult company, but he was otherwise healthy and evidently came from a remarkably robust family; all ten of his siblings survived him, although he lived to a reasonably good age, dying a fortnight short of his sixty-sixth birthday.

The amazing ignenuity displayed in Dodgson's many and various works was manifest at an early age not only in making up stories, but also in playing all manner of games and manufacturing various kinds of toys, especially the paraphernalia of conjuring tricks. He was an inveterate tinkerer, always devising new games and modifying the rules of old ones.

Dodgson left Rugby School in 1849 to go up to Christ Church College, Oxford, with which he remained associated in various capacities – most notably as a lecturer in mathematics, between 1855 and 1881 – until his death. He was ordained in 1861. After his father's death in 1868 Dodgson moved his sisters to Guildford, and thereafter divided the bulk of his time between Guildford and Oxford. His first book was *A Syllabus of Plane Algebraical Geometry* (1860) and he went on to write several other academic works, including the pioneering text *Symbolic Logic, Part I* (1896), whose intended second part was never completed.

It was in 1856 – the year he acquired his first camera – that Dodgson invented "Lewis Carroll" for use on a

poem published in *The Train* (the pseudonym was a reversal of a re-Anglicization of a Latin version of his Christian names, Carolus Ludovicus). A month after its publication he first made the acquaintance of the four-year-old Alice Liddell, one of the five daughters of the newly-appointed Dean of Christ Church.

Dodgson was later to declare that the story which grew into *Alice in Wonderland* – one of many whose heroine Alice Liddell was appointed to be – was first composed on the "golden afternoon" of 4th July 1862, when he set forth in a rowing-boat with Canon Duckworth, Alice, two of her sisters, and a picnic lunch. Assiduous students of the climatological records have since assured the world that the weather in Oxford on that particular day was lousy, but the significance of this particular picked nit is dubious.

Dodgson subsequently presented Alice with a manuscript version of the story he told that day, entitled "Alice's Adventures Under Ground." It was not, however, until the novelist Henry Kingsley – brother of the more famous Charles, who published *The Water-Babies* in 1863 – saw the manuscript while visiting Dean Liddell that Dodgson was persuaded to think seriously about publishing stories from the remarkable fund he had by then accumulated. Alice's manuscript was subsequently read aloud to the family of Dodgson's friend George MacDonald – who was also to become one of the most important Victorian writers of children's fantasy – in 1863, and MacDonald added his voice to the chorus urging its publication.

Dodgson eventually expanded the 18,000-word "Alice's Adventures Under Ground" into the familiar 53,000-word *Alice in Wonderland*, which was published in 1865. Dodgson was, however, displeased with the typeface of the first edition and had it withdrawn, even though he thought the expense would leave him considerably out of pocket. He need not have worried; following its re-issue in 1866 it was immediately successful and in the course of the next thirty years it sold more than 80,000 copies in the full-priced edition, plus

uncounted thousands of cheaper editions.

In the wake of this success Dodgson wrote a sequel, presumably drawing on the same accumulated fund of anecdotes and whimsies, but adding a stronger and more complicated narrative frame by virtue of which the story recapitulates the moves in a rather absurd game of chess. *Through the Looking-Glass* was published just in time for Christmas 1871, but was dated 1872. The text was not quite as Dodgson intended it; the artist who had been commissioned to illustrate both books, John Tenniel, expressed dissatisfaction with one of its chapters, which was omitted. The missing episode has recently been published as *The Wasp in a Wig* (1977).

Dodgson wrote one more classic work of nonsensical fantasy, the marvellous mock-epic poem *The Hunting of the Snark* (1876), which has many affinities with the Alice books, but was never able to do anything more in the same vein. The mother-lode which he had mined so avidly was exhausted, and was seemingly incapable of renewal.

Alice in Wonderland was a watershed in the history of children's literature whose significance can hardly be overstated. Earlier in the century there had been considerable debate among educationalists as to what was or was not suitable reading for children. Some Utilitarians wondered whether the traditional tales preserved in oral culture for the consumption of children were injurious to a child's sense of reality by virtue of their use of fantastic materials; Charles Dickens was one of several writers moved to protest this idiocy. Almost all of the writers who undertook to produce literary versions of old folk tales – notably Charles Perrault and the brothers Grimm – took it for granted that part of their task was to turn the tales into moral fables which might play a significant role in the “civilization” of young children, and most writers who took up the task of producing new “fairy tales” – most significantly Hans Christian Andersen – fully accepted a similar duty to moralize. The idea that stories might be written for children which would entertain them without moralizing was, in this historical context, both original and daring, and the idea that calculated nonsense was an appropriate form of entertainment was doubly so.

Alice in Wonderland is not without moral sensibility, but the general tenor of its rhetoric is that it is both sensible and appropriate for children to take an occasional rest from the demands of duty. Alice is initially put to sleep by a tediously instructive text, and her valiant determination to use the time she

spends in free fall productively reciting her lessons is soon put into proper perspective by the time-killing madness of the Mad Hatter's Tea-Party and by delightful parodic versions of some popular moralistic rhymes. Isaac Watt's sententiously worthy “How doth the little busy bee / Improve each shining hour” is neatly transmuted into “How doth the little crocodile / Improve his shining tail.”)

Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* was not the first children's book to make use of nonsense. Edward Lear's *The Book of Nonsense* (1846) had broken the ground, and expanded editions of it had been issued in 1861 and 1863. The most famous Lear poems are, however, of later origin; “The Owl and the Pussycat” and “The Jumblies” first appeared in 1871, and “The Dong with the Luminous Nose” and “The Pobble Who Has No Toes” in 1877. Given that most common nursery rhymes had lost whatever sense they might once have had, Lear's earlier innovations cannot have seemed so very striking. Carroll's Alice books went much further even in the realm of nonsense verse, and this was only one of their several aspects. The Carroll books presumably played a key role in assisting Lear to attain the marvellous limits of his own endeavour. 1871 might easily be reckoned the Golden Age of nonsense verse, by virtue of the publication in that year of the two Lear classics and both “Jabberwocky” and “The Walrus and the Carpenter” in *Through the Looking Glass*.

The Alice books are even more striking, however, in the bizarrerie of Alice's encounters with all manner of strange creatures, and in the clever wit which dresses her dialogues with them. Those educationalists who thought it bad for children to be told stories about fairies, either on the grounds that fairies did not exist, or because they were creatures of pagan mythology, might easily have felt insulted by the production of a book (by a clergyman!) which not only ignored all matters of piety and plausibility but which actually took leave to assault and undermine the ethic of self-improvement and the “common sense” of vulgar realism.

Although it is conspicuously light at heart, Lewis Carroll's “nonsense” is never content to be neutral with respect to the “sense” from which it deviates. For the most part it is calculatedly and mercilessly anti-sense. Carroll is particularly anti- those aspects of common sense which only appear to their owner to be sense because they are common and not because they are actually sensible, but it is conscientious in holding almost nothing sacred. This is not because the Reverend Dodgson was in any sense a radical; he was a devout man, a committed supporter of Victorian morality, and so ardent an upholder of theatrical

censorship that he thought Thomas Bowdler's version of Shakespeare too liberal. It was because he considered the Alice books to be a realm apart from the world where the rule of Moral Order was absolute: an utterly innocent imaginary space where such issues were quite irrelevant.

It is highly significant that when, late in life, Dodgson decided to write another children's fantasy – one which he intended to be of much higher literary ambition and quality – he undertook the task in a very different spirit. *Sylvie and Bruno* (1889) and *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded* (1893) are not without ingenuity, but they are constructed on a firm moral-allegorical base which so comprehensively wrecks their imaginative ambitions that they seem to be the work of another and much less interesting man. The fact that they take aboard some of the mystical and spiritualistic claptrap which came to fascinate Dodgson late in life is also severely to their disadvantage.

Dodgson befriended many little girls after Alice grew up – when Savile Clarke produced a theatrical version of the stories in 1886 Dodgson commenced a long friendship with Isa Bowman, the juvenile actress hired to play the lead – but he never found another Muse, and became sadly suspicious of the merits of the nonsense with which he had tried so hard to build a commonwealth of understanding with Alice Liddell.

As the title of the second book suggests, the Alice books hold up a mirror to the world of Victorian rationalism, in which everything is comprehensively skewed. The narratives are, of course, dream-fantasies which end, scrupulously enough, with the restoration of all that was disturbed, but at the end of *Through the Looking-Glass* the reader is explicitly instructed to consider very carefully the question of whose dream it has been. The Red King has, of course, laid claim to it in the text, and Alice is fully entitled to wonder whether she is the dreamer or the dreamed.

Further to this point, the sentimental poem appended to the text, which celebrates the possibly-unreliable memory of the golden afternoon of the picnic on the river, represents childhood itself as a mental “Wonderland” from whose dream children are unfortunately doomed to wake. It then “consoles” us with a climactic suggestion that the stream of Life down which we are all condemned to drift can also be regarded as a kind of dream.

The historical fate of the Victorian rationalism which the Alice books call so innocently into question is rather ironic. Nineteenth-century positivists thought that they were on the threshold of understanding the universe, and

that reason and mathematics were the tools which would enable them to see the sense of things. But when the not-so-slow Mill of Systematic Logic came to grind exceeding small it revealed to its dutiful but perplexed millers that the fundamental reality of the physical universe was so very peculiar, and so antithetical to common sense, that they were quick to invoke the analogy of Carroll's topsy-turvy wonderlands.

In talking about Einstein's theory of relativity, Sir Arthur Eddington, Bertrand Russell and George Gamow all laid out fairly elaborate arguments based in this comparison; the development of quantum mechanics encouraged further commentaries of the same ilk. The bewildered Alice, confronting a series of accounts of the world which flatly deny the dictates of common sense, has been transformed by the actual pattern of scientific discovery into a modern Everyman. Natural philosophy's ultimate judgment of the subversive elements of the Alice books is pre-echoed internally by the relativistically-challenged Red Queen, who points out that you have to run twice as hard to get anywhere because you have to run hard just to stay in the same place. "You may call it 'nonsense' if you like," she tells Alice, in her censorious fashion, when told that she is not making sense, "but I've heard nonsense compared with which that would be as sensible as a dictionary."

Nor is it only in the problematic world of modern science that the Alice books have supplied useful metaphors. Numerous political satires have borrowed the method and apparatus of the Alice books, including C.E.M. Joad's *The Adventures of the Young Soldier in Search of the Better World* (1943). More recently, the interest in alternative states of consciousness aroused by the LSD boom of the 1960s put Tenniel's illustration of the hookah-puffing Caterpillar into a new perspective; the sound and image of Jefferson Airplane's Grace Slick singing "Remember / what the Dormouse Said... / Feed your head! / Feed your head!" became one of the enduring monuments of the decade. Not merely the last example, but all of this, would have disappointed the Reverend Dodgson as much as it astonished him.

The Reverend Dodgson knew, of course, that many of Alice's encounters touched on authentic philosophical problems. Elementary problems in logic crop up in the conversation of most of the characters in the first volume, while more abstruse questions about the significance of names and the status of general terms are obliquely raised in such sequences in the second volume as that which deals with Tweedledum and Tweedledee and that which features Humpty Dumpty. In drawing out this playful potential, however, the author may

well have been as blissfully unaware as young Alice of the extent to which these questions would remain perversely vexed as logic, philosophy and mathematics continued their convoluted evolution. He must have been fully aware of the fact that his careful recomplication of the notion of dreaming at the end of *Through the Looking Glass* raised issues which had been more ardently and earnestly discussed by Bishop Berkeley, but had Dodgson found any real cause for anxiety in such questions Lewis Carroll surely would not have indulged them so freely.

To the extent that they are prophetic the Alice books are prophetic by accident, and the Reverend Dodgson might well have been appalled to find them so – every bit as appalled, perhaps, as he would have been by other aspects of modern commentary on the intricacies of the text. Nevertheless, they are prophetic. The optimistic common sense of the Victorians has been comprehensively eroded by modern discovery, modern doubt and modern cynicism; its rational elements have been shown to be ludicrously simple-minded and its moral elements have been so comprehensively assaulted as to seem to many not merely foolish but actively evil.

Dodgson could not have foreseen such developments in any detail, but he was not without an inkling of the precariousness of Victorian optimism. *The Hunting of the Snark* – in which a Victorian Ship of Fools is steered by reckless heroism, according to the advice of a blank map, to a fatal culminating encounter with the monstrous Boojum – displays a certain ironic and pessimistic awareness. Dodgson's conscientious self-indulgence in the *World of Nonsense* could not, in the end, exclude a reluctant recognition of the Reality Principle, and it is not entirely surprising that he gave it up thereafter.

It is perhaps unfortunate that the irony of Carroll's all-too-sensible nonsense did not stop with its wry vindication in the worlds of science and politics. The ruthless expositors of the syphilitic worm in the delicate bud of Victorian hypocrisy collected up the Reverend Dodgson with countless others, and set him in the psychoanalytic dock, charging him with secretly – or, at best, subconsciously – harbouring paedophilic desires.

Dodgson's apologists have been quick to point out that his interest in taking nude photographs of children was a short-lived whim, and that his doing so was fully sanctioned by the parents of the children involved. They have pointed out that he was also intensely interested, for a while, in taking photographs of eminent Victorian men, and that he gave up the hobby – seemingly without a qualm – when it began to bore him.

The idea that there was any sexual element in Dodgson's interest in Alice Liddell is written off by his apologists as the product of dirty minds unable to conceive of true innocence, and they are very probably right. But even if we assume – as we surely must – that Dodgson's relationship with Alice was undeserving of any kind of moral or medical stigmatization, we must still recognize that there was something about it which was very precious and uniquely meaningful to Dodgson.

Perhaps the significance of his friendship with Alice would have faded easily enough as it became merely one more in a long series of temporary encounters had Dodgson not undertaken to prepare the two books for publication, hence conferring unique status upon it; but we must remember he was spontaneously moved to write out the manuscript of "Alice's Adventures Under Ground," and he certainly was not compelled by any kind of commercial or artistic necessity to add the two mawkish poems which serve as preface and postscript to the text of *Through the Looking-Glass*. The second of these says of the Alice of 1862: "Still she haunts me phantomwise, / Alice moving under skies / Never seen by waking eyes."

Save for the mere fact of their existence the texts of the Alice books offer little insight into the heart of this relationship, but it is notable that the White Knight – Dodgson's not very flattering parody of himself – is the only individual encountered by Alice in the *Looking-Glass* world who speaks to her in a kindly and affectionate manner, and who offers her real assistance in an ungrudging manner. Dodgson's alter ego in the first volume is, of course, the Dodo (how many times must he have stammered over an introduction?) who declares after the caucus race that "Everybody has won and all must have prizes," but instantly appoints Alice as prize-giver, and has to improvise a special prize for her when she has unselfishly disposed of all her comfits. There is, however, one intriguing exchange between Alice and Humpty Dumpty when Alice observes that "One can't help getting older". Humpty Dumpty is inevitably quick to seize the possibility of a misinterpretation, but his reply is more than usually odd. "One can't, perhaps," he observes, "but two can. With proper assistance, you might have left off at seven." Here, surely, there is an authentic depth of feeling, and a message of sorts.

But Alice is, of course, absolutely right. One can't help getting older, and one can't preserve the golden afternoon of childhood, even by the most determined efforts of social intercourse and communication. The carefully-shaped nonsense by means of

Continued on page 68

In Eleanor Arnason's **Ring of Swords** (Tor, \$21.95), FTL drive, unexpectedly discovered by human physicists in 2030, has opened up the galaxy. On an undeveloped habitable planet at the "edge" of this expansion (whatever that means, in space-time), Anna Perez is trying to glimpse truly alien intelligence, in the behaviour of some giant jellyfish-like animals. Her research base site is unlucky enough to be chosen as the venue for diplomatic negotiations between the human powers-that-be and the highly militarized, furry, humanoid *hwarhath*. Anna and her colleagues are excluded from the talks, and indifferent: accepting that the outcome – peace or war – is totally beyond their control. But the *hwarhath* turn up with a human traitor on their negotiating team, and Anna is instantly drawn to this charming outcast: Nicholas Sanders – a former intelligence agent, captured and "turned" by the *hwarhath* 20 years ago. When there's a (human) attempt to assassinate Nicholas, she intervenes. Anna is now involved. When talks resume after this hitch – and a casual massacre of the human military on Anna's planet – aboard a *hwarhath* space station, the *hwarhath* insist on her presence: the sole representative of non-militarized humanity.

If this were a Carolyn Cherryh novel the negotiations would be backdrop and the aliens would be decor. The novel would centre on questions of loyalty and betrayal, on the relationships between Nicholas, Anna Pérez and Nicholas's alien lover the *hwarhath* "general," Ettin Gwarha – who was once closely involved in the prolonged and horrific torture whereby Nicholas was induced to change sides. What kind of person falls in love with his torturer? What motivates someone apparently goodwilled and sane, actively to promote the outbreak of war between his lover's people and his own kind? Nicholas Sanders is certainly a complex character, and the *hwarhath* space station is a conventional hotbed of intrigue, with everybody bugging everybody else. But though the ground is covered – jealousies, lies and tainted love in the corridors of power – the interpersonal tensions are somehow unrealized. As in her previous novel, *A Woman of the Iron People*, Eleanor Arnason's first interest is in the imaginary culture, and in what it tells us about ourselves.

The furry aliens of *Iron People* were matriarchal, pre-industrial tribesfolk who had trouble finding a role for adult men in their society. The *Hwarhath* (whose feudal period Arnason has explored in "The Hound of Merin," featured in the Tor anthology *Xanadu*, ed Jane Yolen) are now FTL and IVF capable, but they have the same problem. Division between the genders is absolute. Heterosexuality is

an intolerable perversion. The women stay at home, where work is done and life is lived. The men – a ring of swords around the hearth – are enrolled in the military as children. Women can't be soldiers and men have no other life. In *hwarhath* perception war is not a criminal activity, a breakdown of normal life or a disaster. It is a necessary outlet for male aggression, without which society would crumble. They are not much interested in peace. What they need from these talks is a limited "decent" conflict.

These aliens – with their outward formality, their tenacious feudalism, their apparent callousness, and their passion for foreign artforms, have a distinctly "Japanese" flavour. There is even a *hwarhath* Kurosawa on the strength, who spends the novel transcribing *Macbeth* into something that sounds remarkably like *Throne of Blood* with fur on. This is satisfactory entertainment, and makes for pleasant reading. But when we meet the *hwarhath* women – honoured in their protective seclusion, playing no part in the active negotiations – human parallels become more significant. No matter how often we're told that they are very important people, it is clear that the alien "women" (scientists, philosophers, farmers...) are as helpless as their human counterparts. We learn, through the privileged Anna Perez, that the sexual apartheid of their culture does not protect them. Their fate, in a war-driven civilization, is the fate of human non-combatant society through the ages: at the best, to become the property of the conqueror; at the worst, to be massacred out of existence.

As a political thriller, *Ring of Swords* lacks intensity. The secret that Nicholas Sanders rashly decides to reveal isn't much of a secret to the reader by the time it appears. The calm, good-humoured detachment of Anna Perez doesn't make for a suspenseful delivery of the story. But perhaps that's the point. To Arnason the outcome of this round is irrelevant. This is a book about the *problem* of war: and the problem won't go away.

The *hwarhath*, dismissing female soldiers as non-person perverts, regard Anna Perez as a genuine woman: and in *gestalt* they're right. If a woman is

someone uninterested in military solutions, Anna and Nicholas the traitor represent that division of humanity. Their shockingly casual attitude to "loyalty" and "treachery" unites them from the start. But can the women of the cosmos escape from the insensate tyranny of the war-mongers? The last image from *Ring of Swords* is bleak: Anna, studying the beautiful sea-monsters who hover on the brink of self-consciousness. They seem to be genuinely innocent and peaceful creatures. But if that's what they are, they're not people.

Gestalt, the perception of pattern, is crucially important also in Michaela Roessner's **Vanishing Point** (Tor, \$21.95): a fact hinted at in the bizarre opening, then buried in what seems a straightforward B-movie scenario – the gist of which is that most of the people in the world vanished 30 years ago.

I suspect Michaela Roessner knows the ancient (1951) proto-gender-issues novel *The Disappearance* (Phillip Wylie), which uses this same device. There is a relationship between the two books, for in Wylie it transpires that there has been a catastrophic but temporary *slip in gestalt* organized by God (or someone similar) to Teach People a Lesson. In Michaela Roessner's *Vanishing Point*, 30 years after the B movie that broke out and never ended, the survivors are still desperate for that kind of solution: heaven, hell, the hand of God, some meaning for their loss (we're all cult members now, one character observes) – a salvation that the novel resolutely denies them. Life is dominated by this hunger, by fading crazy dreams of restoration: and by the constant subliminal fear, crossing generations, that it could happen again.

The focus is on a Californian community, a mixed bunch of people who inhabit a fascinating old overgrown folly they call The House (which, I learned from the back of the cover, is based on a real place, Winchester Mansion, San Jose); and particularly on a young woman called Renzie and her friends and relatives. It's a romantic frontier existence of trading fairs, organic farming, feasts and friendships, brushfire wars. The narrative of

Sour Rhyme and Sweet Reason

Gwyneth Jones

commune life is infected by a new-age post-holocaust soapiness. There are too many people lining up to sort out their emotional scars, too many of those improbably rational soap-opera conversations where lovers, or parents and children, manage to say exactly what they mean and finally get to understand each other. Social realism suffers, when many of "our" problems have been conveniently swept away. Characterization suffers, when everyone (even the House) is a *character* in the sense of certified eccentric. But luckily there is another thread: a turn of the cosmic screw as dastardly as anything the most paranoid cultists have imagined.

In Roessner's fragile society there is no easy division between the warmongers and the civilized rest of us. Every fight is for bare existence and everyone has to pitch in. Yet there is a non-combatant group in Arnason's sense – the weirdos whose faith is neither in survival nor in transcendental salvation. The post-Vanishing scientific community is still trying to unravel what "really" happened. Cutting-edge opinion, when the novel opens, is that the event was the local manifestation (or human perception?) of a cosmological-scale event: a massive vacuum-fluctuation, a shift in the fundamental unrealities of virtual particle physics. But was the Vanishing an effect or a cause? And what comes next...?

There's some dry fun on the eternal problems of pure research. To secure what passes for funding (time off from hoeing the vegetables) the scientists have to pretend they are looking for something useful: even, remotely, a restoration of the lost billions. But though they are scrabbling for time and for energy to power their computers, the rag-bag scientists of San Jose are phenomenally well-equipped. At least artificial intelligence was not affected by the catastrophe... Or so they believe, until a maverick luminary from the East arrives. And then, 30 years after it began, things really start to fall apart.

The friendship between young Renzie and the pre-Vanishing physicist Nesta Eastermann is the most important relationship in the book. They have no soap-business to do, the connection is purely science-fictional; a bridge across the climactic event. There have been cute, somewhat clichéd hints about the third-generation children: but it is through Renzie's interaction with Nesta that the insidious, pervasive strangeness of the post-Vanishing world makes an impact – and the truth begins to emerge from the head-in-sand oblivion of the survivalist-utopia we've been sharing.

It's in the nature of Roessner's multifarious new *gestalt* that it resists

conventional plotting, and the simple action-packed finale of *Vanishing Point* is a disappointment. The real conclusion of the novel is in the afterword that spirals back, and shows us the post-Vanishing world as it must have looked all along if we'd had the eyes to see. But was the strangeness always there? Or have we been slipping and sliding through the laminated multiverse since page one, every sentence a new cosmos? In the saturated solution of realities Roessner proposes, who can tell?

Eleanor Arnason and Michaela Roessner are recommended. If you're in a position to buy these books, count on thoughtful, pleasurable reading. But for sheer disreputable entertainment, look no further than Rebecca Ore's *Alien Bootlegger* (Tor, \$19.95). If Arnason's 21st-century warp drive is shamelessly pure startrek, Ore's aliens come steeped, with marshmallow topping and barbecue sauce, in contemporary US tabloidese. The pick of the collection is definitely the long title story: which involves the most Ufo-perfect of aliens – with the ray that cuts out your car's engine, weird drugs, invincible weapons, memory gaps, you name it, everything. For reasons that remain obscure, he sets up an illicit hooch still in the blue hills of Virginia. The resident operator resents unfair competition, gets into bother: and a whole posse of sour-sweet, gloriously futuristic-demotic Steel Magnolias stand by their man. ("Steel Magnolias" is probably the wrong state: well, I'm sorry, but you folks all sound the same to me, *hyuck, hyuck*). Pacey, smart, sneakily conformist: this story is a slightly rancid delight.

The rest fall off a little. "Ice Gouged Lakes, Glacier Bound Times," isn't much more than a (concerned-about-the) wildlife programme, Sunday-evening viewing from the next ice age. The first of the *chimera* pieces, "The Tyrant That I Serve," is the business (a "chimera" is an expensive genetically engineered pet, built to resemble a mythological animal and hardwired with suitably decadent conditioning). The Second, "Giant Flesh Holograms Keep My Baby's Eyes Warm," adds nothing but a kooky title.

Rebecca Ore's ear for the language of mall mythology is perfect, it all sounds absolutely wonderful. But she seems to take the mall's icons at face value. Do we really need more stories about the unoriginal sins of the super-rich? The last item in this collection, "Projectile Weapons" – about a young alien lad obsessed with human handarms – is rather noxious if you think about it too hard... a promising Michael Douglas vehicle. Are Rebecca Ore's aliens xenophobic? Probably: this is straight reportage from a highly xenophobic folklore. Does it matter? I'm not sure. Highly enjoyable.

Morgan Llywelyn's *The Elementals* (Tor, \$21.95) is dreadful. It consists of four stories of cataclysm involving, yes, earth, water, fire and air, and spanning human history. It reads like the kind of early technicolor about the Fall of Atlantis that you (I) think will be so bad it's funny: but it is not. I can't imagine who buys this dull tosh.

The Element of Fire by Martha Wells (Tor, \$22.95) on the other hand is a costume comedy-thriller, set in *Three Musketeers* fantasy-land, with hostile magic. Do I detect a happy and loony cross-fertilization between *faerie* and cyberpunk? Punk changeling Kade Carrion hacks her way through magic ICE, saves the kingdom; snaffles gorgeous True Thomas. There is a bad set-piece opening, but the characters are engaging, the gruesome effects inventive. Good fun. If, that is, you have the patience to fight your way through the non-existent editing, or are fortunate enough not to notice the mess.

(Gwyneth Jones)

And the Walls Came Tumbling Down... Wendy Bradley

Incompetent plot construction makes a book shake like a jerry-built house: the characters balance unsteadily on a tottering framework of coincidence, and the descriptive fluff pushed into the cracks can't keep out the chill wind of unsuspended disbelief.

Anne McCaffrey's *Damia's Children* (Bantam, £14.99) teeters on the brink of collapse like a badly-glued pre-fab. Sixteen years after *Damia* and *Afra* began happy-ever-after-ing they have now produced an entire brood of children: "...thank you, *Damia*. Once again, you're decorating the family crown with the jewels of your womb!" (Puh-lease!) This rent-a-brood (neither *Afra* nor *Damia* seems to have been aged, mellowed or even changed by this fecundity) of children keep hitting sixteen in the course of the novel and as each child reaches this arbitrary turning point the universe conspires to hit a perfectly timed crisis that requires a child with exactly their combination of personality traits and psychokinetic talents to solve it and save the world. Effectively this is four novellas glued end to end and tied together with string, and it's so badly sub-edited that on p81 it goes into unnecessary italics for half a page. For completists and juveniles only.

Mickey Zucker Reichert's novel *The Last of the Renshai* (Millennium,

£8.99) is badly served by its title and its blurb, both of which lead you to expect a novel about someone who is the last survivor of the Renshai people, a warrior tribe with a positively suicidal ethical code. However the rules for admission to the Renshai keep changing: do you have to have Renshai parents? Renshai training? No physical blemishes? All of the above? There are also plenty of characters other than the hero who might qualify for eponymous heroism and so you spend a fair amount of reading time with gritted teeth and a lurking desire for someone who can do genocide thoroughly.

The plotting is, in places, just plain silly. I refuse to believe an orphan child of ten, however battle-trained and berseker, could make mincemeat of armoured adults, and I was particularly uncharmed by the missing-heir-to-the-kingdom who we were told had been living incognito in the village after he'd left. On the other hand the writing was fine, the world was well drawn and the book nicely produced: with a bit more "oh yea?" from an editor the sequel might be fun.

Competence alone is not enough to create memorability: **Practical Demonkeeping** by Christopher Moore (Mandarin, £4.99) is mildly humorous with a satisfying tick tock of a plot which works out nicely to a suitable happy ending. An accidentally raised demon is combated by a djinn and a zen fisherman in a small town full of your average wise barkeeps, Derby-and-Joan couples, fab waitresses with unhappy marriages to feckless drunks and so on. There are a few laughs and sound construction but nothing out of the ordinary: something to keep out the winter chill of the real world but not something that will attract tour buses.

Similarly Greg Costikyan's **By the Sword**, (Tor, \$18.95) is competently put together but with a slightly weird cast to the construction, as if the bricklayer had decided to mortar in a set of roof tiles and a garden gnome at around shoulder-height. A young barbarian plainsman coming to maturity finds he is the son of a god. Exiled from his tribe he finds work in the big city, rescues the princess from the dragon – and then ends triumphantly by becoming everything he had previously despised, throwing out his feckless tribesmates and wallowing in the lap of luxury. Maybe you had to be there.

Steven Brust's latest, **Agyar** (Tor, \$18.95), is a nice but slight contemporary character piece with one minor technical flourish. Brust is skilful enough to keep his hero's race secret and let us deduce it from his actions – the hypnotic power over women, the refusal to enter buildings until invited – as we share his thoughts via a type-

written diary and a vaguely helpful ghost. My copy of the book was just bound proofs with no artwork so I don't know whether Tor had the courage to keep the not very surprising development a surprise or whether the cover shrieks what the text tells you gently – he's a vampire, stupid! But then this is a pointless construct, like building a five-walled house. If you aren't familiar enough with vampire lore to get it you won't understand the book at all, and if you are you'll know what's what by the end of the first scene. Too clever by half, I'm afraid.

Finally Liane Jones' **The Dreamstone** (Mandarin, £4.99) begins brilliantly, as if we are watching the construction of a gothic cathedral, and then rapidly degenerates as if the builders ran out of stone and started using straw. A Welsh poet busy Dylan Thomasing his way through a visiting poetship on an American campus falls for the downtrodden plain-Jane deputy editor of the college magazine and their story is somehow paralleled by the love of legendary Welsh Prince Madoc and his lowly lover Ceinwen. Madoc and Ceinwen lead the expedition to colonize America in the 1100s and there is a Mandan Indian, Glesig, complicating matters with his stone talisman. However as the plot thickens it also becomes more preposterous as Jane's adolescent American Indian lover Sam Burns turns out to be the last of the Mohicans – sorry, Mandans – and each of the characters has a mage/cronne adviser to let them know the love triangle between Madoc, Ceinwen and the Mandan Glesig has to be played out in each generation until someone finally Gets It Right. Guess who? (Wendy Bradley)

Pet Words Peter Crowther

At the height of their creativity – achieved with the release of their magnificent *Pet Sounds* album – The Beach Boys' songs were dubbed pocket symphonies. In the same way, it would be just as acceptable – and accurate – to categorize Canadian fantasist Charles de Lint's short stories as pocket epics.

If de Lint's work were itself a piece of music then the principal instruments on display would be Uilleann pipes and electric guitars, with each paragraph an amalgam of the mythical and the commonplace, the traditional and the innovative.

Already highly regarded for his novels *Moonheart*, *Greenmantle* and *Ghostwood*, de Lint is, in the words of Terri Windling (from her introduction to his "Timeskip" story in *Year's Best Fantasy and Horror*), "a pioneer of

'urban fantasy'." He's also a critic, scholar and publisher of the genre... and, presumably when he should be sleeping, he finds the time to be a musician specializing in traditional folk material.

Dreams Underfoot (subtitled "The Newford Collection"), a volume of his shorter pieces which includes the novelettes "Ghosts of Wind and Shadow" and "Our Lady of the Harbour" (previously only available as chapbooks from Axolotl Press) and "The Stone Drum" (Triskell Press), has just been released in America by Tor Books, priced \$22.95. Gathering other stories from some of the best anthologies of recent years plus work that previously appeared in *Asimov's*, *Pulp*house and *F&SF* – plus two stories original to the collection – *Dreams Underfoot* is a celebration of the fantastic.

Charles de Lint's fictional town of Newford is built on the ruins of Old City, now lying deep underground as a result of the Great 'Quake of the 1800s. There was some talk of renovating the ruins as a tourist attraction – as had been done with the old, sunken town of Seattle – but the project proved to be unrealistic. Thus the labyrinthine streets, alleys and sewers of Old Town missed their opportunity to be yet another theme park and, instead, provide shelter for the usual motley collection of human flotsam and jetsam who make their fragile homes in the darkness and the damp.

But there are things other than bag ladies and drunks which inhabit the depths of Old Town, things with their own rules and attitudes. And they have a habit of surfacing every now and again into Newford, where their comings and goings – and their myths and legends – are recorded courtesy of local author/anthropologist/mystic Christy Riddell in his books *Underhill* and *Deeper Still* and *How To Make The Wind Blow*.

As a palette from which to create word pictures, this home-grown mythology may sound old hat but it's not. Blending Lovecraft's imagery, Dunstany's poetry, Jonathan Carroll's surrealism and Alice Hoffman's small town-strangeness, de Lint's Newford stories are a haunting mixture of human warmth and cold inevitability, of lessons learned and prices to be paid.

Here is a tweed-suited ghost who walks the same route every time it rains; a young boy with wire-cutters whose sole mission in life is to free chained-up bicycles; a race of elf-like troglodytes whose king must appear every moon in order to retain his throne; a woman whose belief is physically translated to a crow imprisoned within her chest; and a local variant on the Yeti who makes occasional forays into the back-alleys searching for food in the trashcans.

Amidst literary doffs-of-the-cap to Tolkien, Chesterton and Twain, and musical references to 10,000 Maniacs, The Pogues and de Lint's own fictional band, No Nuns Here, the participants assemble: faery folk, magicians, hustlers and shucksters...painters, wizards, Earth Mothers, fiddlers and even ordinary people. They gather along Yoors Street and Grasso Street and Lower Crowsea, standing well back from streetlights and sunshine alike, nestling in disused doorways and boarded-up subway entrances. And, from there, they steal the normal and the mundane, leaving in its wake a benign otherworldliness with just the right amount of apprehension and an aftertaste of the indomitable strength of the human spirit.

Highly recommended.

Also always highly recommended is Ellen Datlow's and Terri Windling's **The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror**, and this year's outing – the sixth (St Martin's Press, \$16.95 in paperback, \$27.95 in hardback) – is no exception.

With a grand total of 46 short stories and seven poems, there really is something for absolutely anyone interested in the field of the fantastic and the macabre. It would be churlish and downright foolish to argue the inclusion of any individual story, just as it would be to argue a story's exclusion, but the undoubted strengths of this annual collection are actually not contained within the fiction section but in the comprehensive essays on the year under consideration which preface the stories – "Fantasy" from Windling and "Horror" from Datlow, plus one on "Media Activities" from Ed Bryant. Collectively, these account for 74 pages on top of 500 pages of short fiction.

Eclectic, original and compulsively readable, this is the book of the year for the short story enthusiast and a must-buy for any fan of the genre.

It's good to see that Brian Hodge, one of the newer breed of American writers whose short stories I can happily confess to having enjoyed over the past two or three years, made it in to Datlow's and Windling's "Honourable Mentions" section...not once but three times. And well-deserved, too.

But it's because of this that his book **Nightlife** (Pan, £4.99) comes as something of a disappointment. It's not exactly a bad book nor even badly written, but its agenda is far too obvious and its pacing and characters stilted.

In *Nightlife* Hodge takes us into deepest man-turns-into-beast country, though his backpack containing originality and wit has been lost en route. As a result, a fairly predictable and two-dimensional tale of a bizarre, cocaine-like drug getting onto the streets and turning the nose-candy set

into bestial regressives lacks both heart and substance. We can only hope that the sequel – *The Darker Saints*, already available in the US from Dell/Abyss – lifts the standard to that of the author's shorter work.

Ever since 1974 when, in his "Loose Ends" column in the Boston/Cambridge area *Village Voice*-style weekly, *The Real Paper*, US music journo Jon Landau referred to Bruce Springsteen as "rock and roll future" (frequently mis-quoted as "the future of rock and roll") and effectively blighted The Boss's career for several years, one has naturally tended to avoid sweeping prophecies. But, equally, one knows the feeling. After all, presumably Stephen King felt similarly when he referred to Clive Barker as "the future of horror." It's all subjective.

Well, maybe – just maybe – with the publication of his sixth novel, **Gideon** (New English Library, £15.99) – Stephen Laws can safely be heralded as "the big new thing." If his work so far could justify such accolades as "a new heir to the horror throne" (*Starburst*), then *Gideon* should place him at the forefront of the field.

The book opens with three women in an underground car-park, where they are waiting for a man called Gideon. When he arrives, they shoot him dead. It's a startling and intriguing beginning to what turns out to be a headily compulsive novel of offbeat infatuation. In flashback, we learn just what it was that marked the victim for death in the eyes of the three women. We learn how Gideon mesmerized happily-married Jacqueline into leaving her librarian post to have sex with him in the bushes outside; of how he took Yvonne in an alley while her baby son lay in a dustbin; and of how he brainwashed the lesbian television newsreader Bernice into giving her all in a parked car. All bad enough, but it didn't end there.

Day after day, Gideon returned to each of them. And, despite their every attempt to overcome his powers of persuasion, they succumbed to his every wish, no matter how crude. But soon they realized that Gideon was robbing them of much more than their physical affections: he was actually stealing their life-force, temporarily aging them after each encounter. And each time it was taking just a little longer for them to return to their usual state.

Meanwhile, Paul Shapiro's clergyman father is brutally attacked by a man for no apparent reason. The man has already murdered Paul's institutionalized mother and, while his father is taken to hospital, Paul is suddenly besieged by a strange rage, a mysterious inner voice which screams for revenge. On a lonely road, filled with a bestiality that he can neither

understand nor control, he meets the man in a deserted filling station and kills him. But *There are others*, the voice in his head tells him. And he must kill them all. Paul obeys.

Bernice hires a private detective to follow her the next time she slips out of her house. The detective does as he is told and Gideon is tracked down. The detective continues to watch the man and discovers other women, other liaisons. Bernice contacts Jacqueline and Yvonne and the three hatch their plan to kill Gideon. Next stop – the underground car-park.

Meanwhile, Paul Shapiro finds – or is found by – another whom he must kill. Just as things appear to be going against him, he is rescued by a middle-aged man called Van Buren and taken away to a small cottage by the sea. Van Buren ties Paul up and waits for the onset of another attack of the rage which signals that another adversary is near. As they wait, we discover the full story behind Van Buren's mission, how it ties in with Gideon, and why Paul must be protected at all costs.

We also find out more about Gideon himself and, as the story catches up with the three women in the car-park, it becomes abundantly clear that disposing of their assailant is not going to be as easy as they think. The fact is, Gideon is a far bigger problem when he's dead than he was when he was alive. And there's still half of the story yet to be told!

Gideon is a big, ambitious book, eloquently written, inventively plotted and perfectly paced. Some of Laws's set-pieces – notably the section where Jacqueline is trapped in the library, in broad daylight, by a pack of deranged dogs (reminiscent of Hitchcock's *The Birds*) – are superb examples of pure, edge-of-the-seat suspense. Great stuff.

Chiller (Bantam, \$21.95) by Sterling Blake purports to be a debut but reads like something by a writer who has honed his/her craft to a smoothness normally achieved only after several books.

It's a big book, based on the burgeoning cryonics movement, the means by which terminally ill people elect to have their bodies frozen soon after their death in the hope that they may be thawed out when medical knowledge and technology has progressed to a stage where their illness can be cured. In that respect, it's really science fiction.

But around this theme, Blake weaves a wholly different strand about a fundamentalist zealot called George who, with a gift for computer hacking and a penchant for butchering dogs and people and leaving them in dumpsters, declares a one-man war on Immortality Incorporated, the outfit responsible for holding back souls

released at the point of death. Thus it's also (to use the current catch-all) "dark suspense."

In addition to a small team of dedicated full-timers, Immortality Inc. relies on the voluntary services of people employed within the more standardized ranks of the medical profession. The colleagues of these volunteers are sceptical at best and, on occasion, downright hostile. One such volunteer is Doctor Susan Hagerty.

When Susan's associates at the hospital learn of her involvement in the "chiller" business they are furious, with one man in particular, the wimpish and totally unreasonable Doctor Blevin, determined to secure her disbarment from the hospital staff. Elsewhere, George – now besotted by the self-styled evangelist Reverend Montana – regards his course as clear: the "corpsicle" people must be stopped. He follows Susan jogging on the beach and throws her from the cliff-top. Her injuries prove to be fatal.

Susan's friends and colleagues in Immortality Inc. seek to freeze her until such time that they can repair the blocked artery which caused her death. The hospital staff are less than enthusiastic. What follows is part courtroom drama – without the courtroom – as we delve into the rights and wrongs of cryonics and the rights (or lack of them) of an individual to decide what happens to his or her body after it ceases to function; part detective mystery, as the I.I. people must eventually take the law into their own hands and steal Susan's body to prevent an autopsy; and part horror story, as the usually thorough George starts to make mistakes with his trail of dead bodies.

The characters are skilfully and fully drawn through a story that is expansive without in any way being padded, and meticulously documented – in terms of civil rights, police and medical procedures, and the behavioural extremes of a psychopath – without reading like a textbook. These are real people – with believable (and consistent!) personalities – and real situations, and their depiction is so vividly executed that *Chiller* ceases to become a story but rather a continuing saga. And it soon becomes clear that the resolution could go absolutely any way.

Fascinating, frightening – more so in terms of the red tape and bureaucracy than in the activities of yet another fervent serial killer – and all too plausible, *Chiller* provides an intoxicating glimpse into tomorrow's newspaper headlines. At the very least, Sterling Blake – or whoever he/she is *really* – has unintentionally (or maybe not) called for a new definition as to what constitutes death. I'm already clearing a spot in the freezer.

(Pete Crowther)

There's a Time and a Place for Being Life-Affirming Andy Robertson

I have just read an interview with a newish and very popular sf writer. It was quite interesting, but not to the point here, except in that she confessed to having been terribly shocked (and put off the whole field for a decade) by something she read 20 years ago. "Rather poisonous," she said; and later, "I believe sf should be life-affirming, not something that makes you want to go away and cut your wrists" – or words to that effect.

Rather poisonous: 20 years ago. I wonder if I can guess who it was she read? But let me start by saying that I don't agree with her ideas, at least in their most superficial sense. We inhabit a reality which is alien to life, one where the deepest categories of meaning have no roots at all, and the best work in the field should embrace the fact. Real sf is about breaking through the world-fence, not about fighting and fucking within it, however cosily transformed by gadgetry, and if there's a place for naive affirmations of life it is not here.

It happens to be about 20 years since I encountered the work of Mark Geston. I read his second novel, *Out of the Mouth of the Dragon*, and I was very deeply moved. The book's desolate vision and unthinkable apocalyptic climax have remained living in my mind ever since. I'd be the first to confess that Geston's work had its rough edges, and that perhaps it was best appreciated in young adulthood, but what a world it contained! The cosmos as corpse-of-God, locked in the spasms of immanent Eschatos; agonies of mind, soul and spirit, and above all, the heartbreaking beauty of war-machines and of destruction, and what that beauty means for the reality where it is always implicit. Exquisite poison. I'm just a horny-thumbed techie, and I had better not try to be too poetic, so I'll choke off my praises there; but I dare to suspect that it was Geston who so shocked and depressed our would-be sf writer 20 years ago.

As for me, "life-affirming" or not, I sought out his work religiously; but four novels (and one short story) were all he produced, over a period of maybe six years. Lack of recognition, or plain old lack of sales, I guess, despite some critical acclaim. It's a depressing but plausible supposition that what most people really want is doses of life-affirmin' in a neat little package. But however that may be, evil

bastards like me are in for a treat now, because Geston has just published *Mirror to the Sky* (Morrow/AvoNova, \$20), his first new novel in nearly two decades, and, even after so long a wait, it is not a disappointment.

So how has Geston changed? He has become more mature in his writing, certainly, and more controlled. The heady mixture of supernatural and scientific fantasia that characterized his earlier period is gone: there are no pegasi sporting with the jet fighters, no angels wilting, just off stage, beneath the swordstrokes of demons and the rains of jellied gasoline. This book is science fiction, not fantasy, and it is firmly set in the primary world a few decades from now. And fashions in Armageddon have changed, too, because if we no longer expect the Final War, we don't have to appeal to the madness of God to talk about the seasons being out of synch, or to preach about the World being wounded – and the tired desperation of Geston's carefully underplayed future reflects this.

The immediate scenario is thus a recognizable projection of the present, one where the emphasis is on breakdown rather than war, and endurance rather than hysteria. Into this is precipitated (but as an acknowledged pulp cliché) the arrival of humanoid aliens-from-space and their reluctant acceptance of the role of tutors, "gods," and replacement saviours. The role is false, of course, and the plot reliably proceeds through the interaction of the "gods" with humanity, the revelation of their real motives, and the slow unpeeling of their pseudo-divinity. But this much is just background, and it is hard to describe the real matter of the book without giving too much away. The gods' contact with Earth is incidental. They are driven by far more urgent fears, and class the problems of humanity as merely typical of a young species. To the favoured élite, they gradually disclose that they are searching for something, or more accurately that something is searching for them. The enemy is not to be sensed by technological means, but through a paranormal ability, the capacity to create works of art which are truly prophetic, or perhaps which act to shape the future. Despite the gods' cool assurance of superiority, the perception this requires turns out to be common among human beings, and from this fact springs a fatal entanglement. The gods try to withdraw, abandoning their bothersome clients and a host of defectors, but as humanity's memory becomes ever more distorted, and as the godly refugees open themselves ever more completely to the airs of Earth, something new comes into being. Finally the gods are forced to return.

Geston's favourite voice was, and

remains, that of a lonely witness inside the skull of survivor, picking through the ruins. But where in his earlier books we had one man searching through chaos, we now have a number of agents – “god” and human – each trying to order and harmonize a universe all too messily recognizable, one where collapse expands and elaborates itself through the very efforts of those who would fight it. There is just possibly something transcendent involved, glimpsed through the gods’ strange artistic ability, but it is no more personifiable than a mathematical theorem, and it is, correctly, kept off-stage. The explicitly fantastic has gone, but the effect is the same. In short, he has pulled off the difficult task of writing an *echt-Geston* story which is believable as science fiction, rather than fantasy. Or perhaps one should say, of writing a Geston story successfully *disguised* as science fiction.

Geston’s writing has improved, but there have been some changes I regret. Even as he has moved towards greater realism, he has toned down the flamboyant imagination that made him so attractive in the past. By choosing *sf* rather than his old wild fantasies, and by then shaping the basic plot out of such a piece of pulp, even as a deliberate artifice, he sometimes skates on thin ice. And some of his old faults are still there. Occasionally the characters feel almost interchangeable, as if the identikit Geston survivor is simply picking alternate mouthpieces; and he still lacks any real background in the sciences, something which, in a work of science fiction, can show in ways which are not merely factually incorrect but embarrassing.

Despite this, he has succeeded. He has transferred the vision of his earlier period out of the old zones of fractured reality to the near future of the real world. He has not succeeded perfectly, but he has succeeded, and this is a work that, though it may make few new converts, will delight his old following. It is as dark as any of his earlier books, but far more real, and real in more subtly painful ways. Yet ultimately it refuses despair, if only because despair is a protest, not an option for the living.

This has not been a remotely unbiased review. Geston will never be a popular writer, but I hope some of you will write off and order a copy of this book. Pure selfishness, if you like. I waited 20 years for it and I was not disappointed. I don’t want to wait another 20 years for the next one.

(Andy Robertson)

British Magazine Reviews

John Duffield

Grotesque is a new fantasy fiction magazine edited and produced by David Logan. Issue 1 is datemarked April ’93, and is A4 with a black & white paper cover. It’s fairly light on illustrations and graphics, but thus gives a lot of text in its 48 typeset pages. As you can tell by the name it leans towards horror, though the soft-tone cover photo of piled skulls *à la* Khmer Rouge gives the wrong impression, because there’s magic stuff in there too. There’s even a story by Molly Brown amongst the ten offered, supplemented by a really droll book-review article and some magazine snippets.

I recommend “The Alchemist’s Apprentice” by Alexander Johnson. This is a precious medieval fantasy that had me thinking about Mickey Mouse and those dancing mops and buckets. Our hero gets indentured to a sly old bugger who creates in turn the philosopher’s stone, the elixir of life, and the universal solvent. Turning base metals into gold is just a side-show. The only problem is that all the tricks work too well. The philosopher’s stone catalyzes anything including your finger, the elixir of life animates even the retort, and the universal solvent does an Arnie Sackner-son and dissolves its way to the centre of the earth. Lovely.

Another one I liked is “Tales from the Boor’s Tusk” by S.P. Tollyfield. This is set in a tavern and gives three competing morality tales, namely Sir Galahad and the Witch, The Travelling Pedlar & the Queen of the Fairies, and finally The Knight the Witch the Princess and the Wizard. Each tale betters the one before, and in the end the good folk of The Boor’s Tusk sup up their ale and wend their pensive way home. I shared their satisfaction.

“Skandia” by Lawrence Dyer is good too. It’s about a bunch of nomads on an ice-sheeted world of the future who discover a suit of armour. The suit of armour is so heavy they fear there’s a long-frozen body inside, but they can’t find the joins to prise it open. Of course after a spell by the fireside it gets up and about, because as we all knew it’s a robot. The story has atmosphere.

I’m less keen on the horror stories. I’ve never been a real horror fan I guess, because if it scares me I don’t like it, and if it doesn’t I still don’t. Anyhow. Whilst Molly Brown is a good smooth writer I wasn’t moved by her story of a would-be TV starlet who gets tricked into a starring role. “Star” is the name of the tale, and yep, the bimbo finds herself centre-stage in a snuff

movie. I don’t mean to sound sexist here, but I just hate stories about gutless passive women. I like a woman with balls. Which is why I hated “Dream Crypt” by Kim Elizabeth Laico, a continuous panic-stricken chase through dark cellars that all ends up with the helpless wimpess bleeding to death from slashed wrists. Tut. And a special tut for “Lazarus,” a dire dire (both meanings) offering by David Logan, editor of *Grotesque*, and doubtless now the man who will reject everything I ever send him.

There are four other stories beyond those I’ve mentioned here, but I can’t go through them all. They’re OK, and made for a magazine that was overall satisfying even if it did score a couple of misses. This was merely the first issue, and I reckon *Grotesque* will do well. Give it a go.

Grotesque: A4, 48 pages, typeset, £2.50 per issue or £9 for a four-issue subscription. Available from and cheques payable to *Grotesque Magazine*, 24 Hightown Drive, Newtownabbey, Co. Antrim, N. Ireland BT36 7TG.



The Lyre has made a re-appearance at last. When editors Ian Sales and Nick Mahoney said it was going to be biannual, all the subscriber suckers like me thought they meant twice a year, not the other way around. Issue 2 came out at MexiCon at the end of May 1993, and is a 40-page A4 glossy with a two-colour cover. It features some fairly interesting non-fiction such as a Graham Joyce interview, a clutch of poems and drabbles, and six stories in all. It’s similar to *Grotesque* in appearance, but whilst the latter is horror & fantasy *The Lyre* is science fiction.

The first story is “The Universe of Things” by Gwyneth Jones, set in an envy-of-the-world Liverpool (sure!) where a garage mechanic uses his robot workshop to fix up an alien’s battered old red plastic car. It started well

and I was beginning to enjoy it but it somehow lost energy and turned into a quasi-religious hallucination I couldn't quite empathize with. After much sitting around hypothesizing, the mechanic sees briefly through alien eyes and imagines the car and workshop to be organically engineered. Apparently this story has also been accepted by Dave Garnett for *New Worlds*, God knows why. Could be interesting though...

"Albania" by Todd Mecklem and Jonathan Falk is a rather childish account of a man on a very brief dive to some mysterious Adriatic undersea ruins where he chances upon a sea monster to whom he returns the gold he found on his previous and equally brief dive. Forget it. Also forget "The Music Lover" by Craig Marnock, about a man who shags his moist pink hitec hifi. Yeuch.

At last a half-decent story comes in the form of "White Loci Peak" by P.F. Hamilton. It's about a bunch of young men and women living on a mining world who have formed an ion-rider team, ever hoping to break into the big time of multimedia mountain gliding. It clicks along with the build-up to the big race itself, an exciting finale where the ion-rider pilots jostle close to the hyper-jumping spaceship to fire off from the gravity backwash and come down halfway round the planet. It's quite a long story but doesn't feel it. Instead it leaves you feeling you want more.

Another one worth its salt is Angus McAllister's "To Put Away Childish Things." In a too-perfect future world people live their own lives until they're 18, when they go through Continuation Day. Shades of *Logan's Run* perhaps, but the difference is that on Continuation Day your clone-father's memories are written over your own, and you become he whilst his corporeal body gets recycled. I won't spoil it by giving the game away, but there's a nice counterplay between dystopia and utopia going on here.

"Le Jour Se Leve" by Peter T. Garratt is about this vicar chappie who's up against an evil popular hero called West, not Oliver North. There's Nicaraguan good guys, religious speeches, and the vicar's wife who proves that Jesus was a woman. The whole tale is a flashback given by the rev whilst he's waiting in the burned-out belfry to save his adulterous mis-sus from burning at the stake. My God, it is slow. In a peal of heavenly thunder the drought is broken and the rain comes down to put out the fire...but by then who gives a toss.

Quite apart from my feelings about each individual story I detected a sameness that proved unexciting. All six stories are set in the future, mainly with a rather twee English provincial air, and in arguably three or four of the

stories there is some kind of religious experience. All in all, the hit rate isn't high enough, and *The Lyre* disappoints. Sorry.

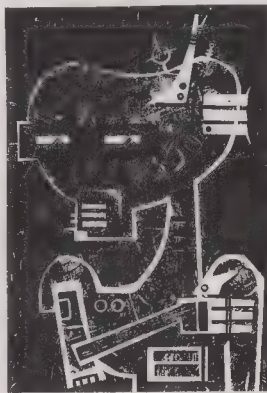
The Lyre: A4, 40 pages. £2.25 or £6 for a three-issue subscription. Available from Nick Mahoney, 275 Lonsdale Avenue, Intake, Doncaster, South Yorks, DN2 6HJ.

Works has come up in the world. With issue 9 it's now A4 and glossy, neatly typeset and with nice illustrations. It looks good, the best so far. In terms of content there's a lot for your dosh, with no fewer than 13 stories. Of course they tend to be on the small side, but some are a decent read.

WORKS #9

£2.00

A Magazine Of Speculative & Imaginative Fiction



Inside This Issue:

Brian Aldiss

Elliot Smith

Neal Asher

Bruce Boston

Andy Darlington

Britain's leading SF magazine for mood orientated fiction & prose

I enjoyed "The Tailgater" by Mike O'Driscoll, about a guy driving away from a cataclysmic nuclear accident, and going loopy in the process. He talks to his passenger, whom he hit too hard a couple of hundred miles back, going nuts about the car that's been following him all that way.

"Contact Unbecoming" by Veronica Colin is also enjoyable. I liked the image of a big pink eager lady who's tired of her scoutship and would prefer to play Godilocks. And the Kevin Cullen artwork is nice too. Amongst the shorter pieces is a neat pisstake of horror writing by Clive Evans, a guy I've seen before. It's aptly named "Horror Writing," about this guy in a garret with a bright red felt-tip. Also nice is "The Return of Mother Earth" by Robert Muir, featuring Elvis Presley and others in a lift that leads onto an awful alternate earth where The King died long ago. Sounds familiar? I also enjoyed "Evolution in Green" by Liz Honeywell, about a guy who's haunted by visions of the tree he planted taking on his wife's features. The wife disappeared years back, and you can guess where he buried her.

I wasn't overly keen on the rest of the material, but I realize that writers like

Brian Aldiss (yea, verily), D.F. Lewis and Paul Pinn have their fans. Also, some people positively like the little mood pieces and poems as alternatives to storytelling. For me there was too much of this sort of thing, but even so the magazine gives fair value. Worth a try.

Works: A4, 40 pages, two or maybe three times a year. £2.00 per issue or £7.50 for a four-issue sub. Available from Dave W. Hughes, 12 Blakestones Road, Slaithwaite, Huddersfield HD7 5UQ. Make cheques out to *Works*.

(John Duffield)

Books Received

June 1993

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by *Interzone* during the month specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in italics at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Aldiss, Brian. **A Tupolev Too Far and Other Stories**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00224033-5, 200pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Sf/fantasy collection, first edition; twelve tales and a poem, most of them first published in original anthologies such as *New Worlds*, *Other Edens* and *Zenith*, and including one, "A Life of Matter and Death," from *Interzone*; our readers may be interested to note that this book does not contain Aldiss's controversial 1992 story "Horse Meat.") 22nd July 1993.

Anthony, Piers. **Isle of Woman: Geodyseye, Volume 1**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85564-8, 448pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; the series of what will no doubt be a massive new series fictionalizing human history from stone-age times to the future.) September 1993.

Ashwell, Pauline. **Unwillingly to Earth**. Tor, ISBN 0-812-51929-9, 280pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1992; Pauline Ashwell is a longstanding British author of mature years [three times a Hugo nominee for her stories in *Asounding/Analog*], and this is her debut novel; it's the US first edition with a [remarkably cheap] British price sticker, distributed in the UK by Pan Books.) 1st August 1993.

Bailey, Robin. **Straight on Til Mourning: Volume II in the Brothers of the Dragon Series**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-55672-7, 280pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1993; it's copyright Byron Preiss Visual Publications, Inc.) 15th July 1993.

Barker, Clive. **Dread**. Adapted by Fred Burke; illustrated by Fred Brereton. Eclipse, ISBN 0-586-21755-X, unpaginated, paperback, £6.99. (Horror graphic novel, first edition; it includes a second story called "Down Satan," adapted by Steve Niles and illustrated by Tim Conrad.) 28th June 1993.

Barker, Clive. **The Thief of Always: A Fable**. Illustrated by the author. Fontana, ISBN 0-00-647311-3, 229pp, paperback, £4.99. (Juvenile horror/fantasy novel, first published in 1992; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 69.) 16th August 1993.

Baxter, Stephen. **Anti-Ice**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-246-13835-1, 280pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Sf novel, first edition; a third novel by a writer the publishers describe as "the new star of British science fiction.") 22nd July 1993.

Bond, Larry. **Cauldron**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0732-1, 526pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Near-future technothriller, first published in the USA, 1993; about a turn-of-the-Millennium war in Europe; according to the copyright notice and an unsigned "Author's Note" [sic] it was co-written with one Patrick Larkin, though this person is not named on title page or cover.) 1st July 1993.

Campbell, Ramsey. **The Count of Eleven**. Tor, ISBN 0-812-52169-2, 404pp, paperback, \$4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the UK, 1992; reviewed by Mary Gentle in *Interzone* 58.) June 1993.

Campbell, Ramsey. **The Long Lost**. "His outstanding new novel." Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0665-1, 375pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Horror novel, first edition; proof copy received; a change of publishers for Ramsey.) 19th August 1993.

Campbell, Ramsey. **Strange Things and Stranger Places**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85514-1, 256pp, hardcover, £18.95. (Horror collection, first edition; it contains the novellas "Medusa" [1987] and "Needing Ghosts" [1990], both originally published as separate slim volumes, and eight other stories.) 8th June 1993.

Collins, Warwick. **Computer One**. No Exit Press [18 Coleswood Rd., Harpenden, Herts. AL5 1EQ], ISBN 1-874061-12-2, 272pp, trade paperback, £7.99. (Sf novel, first edition; the yacht-designer author was previously known for a trilogy of seafaring technothrillers published by Pan; in this book he has turned to full-fledged sf about a 21st-century computer threat.) 26th July 1993.

Cooper, Louise. **The Deceiver: The Chaos Gate Trilogy, Book 1**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21475-5, 280pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1991.) 14th June 1993.

Crichton, Michael. **Jurassic Park**. Arrow, ISBN 0-09-928291-7, 400pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1992; this is the film tie-in reissue, which promptly became Britain's bestselling paperback: an sf novel at number one! [though of course the publishers aren't calling it sf]; reviewed by Ken Brown in *Interzone* 50.) 17th June 1993.

Duane, Diane. **A Wizard Abroad**. Corgi, ISBN 0-552-52744-0, 281pp, paperback, £2.99. (Juvenile fantasy novel, first edition [?]; fourth in the "Wizardry" series.) 22nd July 1993.

Farmer, Philip José. **More Than Fire: A World of Tiers Novel**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85280-0, 300pp, hardcover, \$20.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; the sixth and supposedly concluding novel in this fantasy-flavoured series; unless one counts the related non-sf novel *Red Orc's Rage* [see below], this is Farmer's first "Tiers" novel since 1977.) September 1993.

Farmer, Philip José. **Red Orc's Rage**. Afterword by A. James Giannini, M.D. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21122-5, 282pp, paperback, £4.99. (Psychological fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1991; a curious pendant to the "World of Tiers" series.) 14th June 1993.

Feist, Raymond E. **Magician**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21783-5, 681pp, paperback, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in shorter form in the USA, 1982; this edition follows the revised and restored text first published in 1992.) 28th June 1993.

Forrest, Katherine V. **Daughters of a Coral Dawn**. Women's Press, ISBN 0-7043-4359-2, 226pp, paperback, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1984; the author is now best known as a writer of lesbian/feminist mystery novels.) *Late entry: April publication, received in June 1993.*

Forward, Robert L. **Camelot 30K**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85215-0, 319pp, hardcover, \$20.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received.) September 1993.

Gilfoyle, Keren. **A Shadow on the Skin**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-4110-4, 534pp, paperback, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; a debut book by a new British writer; in the copyright statement the author's name is given as "Keren Woods.") 8th July 1993.

Grabien, Deborah. **And Then Put Out the Light**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-32868-9, 247pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition [?].) 9th July 1993.

Grant, Charles L. **Something Stirs**. Tor, ISBN 0-812-51303-7, 279pp, paperback, \$4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1991.) *Late entry: May publication, received in June 1993.*

Harrison, Harry, and John Holm. **The Hammer and the Cross**. Legend, ISBN 0-09-926051-4, 430pp, trade paperback, £8.99. (Sf novel, first edition; "John Holm" is a pseudonym for Professor Tom Shippey; the book contains black-and-white interior decorations by the same artist who illustrated Harrison's *West of Eden* novels; it's a pity Legend haven't seen fit to give this artist a name credit; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen].) 17th June 1993.

Harrison, Harry. **The Hammer and the Cross**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85439-0, 415pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 1993; proof copy received; collaborator "John Holm" is not mentioned anywhere on this American proof.) September 1993.

Heinlein, Robert A. **The Puppet Masters**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-40578-8, 224pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1951; note that this is not the "restored-text" version published in America in 1990, just a straight reprint of the last NEL edition of 1987.) 1st July 1993.

Heinlein, Robert A. **Space Cadet**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-00737-5, 172pp, paperback, £4.50. (Juvenile sf novel, first published in the USA, 1948; seventh NEL printing since 1971.) 1st July 1993.

Heinlein, Robert A. **Starship Troopers**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-00573-9, 222pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1959; eleventh NEL printing since 1970.) 1st July 1993.

Herbert, James. **Portent**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-58885-8, 415pp, paperback, £5.99. (Sf/horror novel, first published in 1992; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 68.) 1st July 1993.

Joyce, Graham. **House of Lost Dreams**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0691-0, 310pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Horror novel, first edition.) 1st July 1993.

Kerr, Katharine. **A Time of Omens: A Novel of the Westlands**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21196-9, 464pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1992.) 28th June 1993.

Kesey, Ken. **Sailor Song**. Black Swan, ISBN 0-552-99567-3, 574pp, paperback, £6.99. (Literary sf novel, first published in the USA, 1992; the first new full-length work of fiction in 28 years from the author of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* ought to be an event but, oddly, it's appearing in this

country only as a paperback original; set in the future, in Alaska, it seems to be at least marginally sf; it's also a "Hollywood novel," involving a film crew which heads north to shoot on location.) 23rd July 1993.

Kilworth, Garry. **Hogfoot Right and Bird-Hands**. Introduction by Robert Holdstock. Edgewood Press [PO Box 380264, Cambridge, MA 02238, USA], ISBN 0-9629066-3-8, 156pp, paperback, \$9 [plus \$5 for overseas shipping]. (Sf/fantasy collection, first edition; 13 stories; in contents this bears some resemblance to Kilworth's recent British-published collection, *In the Country of Tattooed Men*, with seven stories in common; recommended.) No date shown: June 1993?

Leys, Simon. **The Death of Napoleon**. Translated by Patricia Clancy and the author. Picador, ISBN 0-330-32997-9, 105pp, paperback, £4.50. (Alternative-history novella, first published in France, 1986; Napoleon lives on after escaping from St Helena, in this extremely brief but highly praised [by Julian Barnes, Edna O'Brien, Susan Sontag, etc, etc] literary fantasy; "Simon Leys" is a pseudonym for Pierre Ryckmans.) 2nd July 1993.

Love, Rosaleen. **Evolution Annie and Other Stories**. Women's Press, ISBN 0-7043-4343-6, 232pp, paperback, £6.99. (Sf/fantasy collection, first edition; a second volume by this Australian writer; the title story is a feminist pastiche of Roy Lewis's novel *The Evolution Man*.) *Late entry: April publication, received in June 1993.*

McGirt, Dan. **Dirty Work**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-32391-1, 286pp, paperback, £4.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1993; the third "Jason Cosmo" book.) 9th July 1993.

Marley, Stephen. **Mortal Mask**. Legend, ISBN 0-09-920501-7, 404pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1991; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 58.) 15th July 1993.

Marley, Stephen. **Shadow Sisters**. Legend, ISBN 0-09-926061-1, 432pp, trade paperback, £8.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition [?]; it says "copyright 1992" inside; the third of a sequence set in ancient China.) 15th July 1993.

Matheson, Richard. **7 Steps to Midnight**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85409-9, 318pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Horror/suspense novel, first edition; proof copy received.) September 1993.

Morwood, Peter. **Firebird**. "Fantasy and high magic from the rich lands of Old Russia." Legend, ISBN 0-09-919981-5, 308pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1992; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 64.) 15th July 1993.

Morwood, Peter. **The Golden Horde**. "The third volume in the Prince Ivan series." Legend, ISBN 0-09-926081-6, 312pp, trade paperback, £8.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) 15th July 1993.

Morwood, Peter. **Prince Ivan**. "Volume 1 in an epic new fantasy series set in Old Russia." Legend, ISBN 0-09-967820-9, 280pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1990; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 45.) 15th July 1993.

Navaho, Jo. **A Donkity Crisis**. Fiddle Faddle Press [241 Oldbury Rd., Worcester WR2 6J7], ISBN 0-9520784-0-6, 168pp, paperback, £3.99. (Juvenile fantasy novel, first edition; the author is pseudonymous.) No date shown: June 1993?

Powers, Tim. **The Stress of Her Regard**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-07283-7, 605pp, paperback, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 57.) 12th July 1993.

Reed, Ishmael. **The Terrible Threes.** Allison & Busby, ISBN 0-7490-0102-X, 180pp, paperback, £5.99. (Near-future satirical novel, first published in the USA, 1989; sequel to *The Terrible Twos*; it's described as "a blend of science fiction, folklore, history, fantasy, social satire and all-out surrealist comedy.") 26th July 1993.

Reed, Ishmael. **The Terrible Twos.** Allison & Busby, ISBN 0-7490-0052-X, 178pp, paperback, £5.99. (Near-future satirical novel, first published in the USA, 1982.) 26th July 1993.

Saul, John. **Darkness.** Bantam, ISBN 0-553-40340-0, 373pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1991; one sign of mainstream bestselling success [John Saul is a big seller in the USA] is the increasing brevity and unoriginality of the titles: this one is called *Darkness* and his next, we are told, is called *Shadows*.) 5th August 1993.

Shepard, Lucius. **The Golden.** Orion/Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-110-3, 216pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Horror/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1993.) 15th July 1993.

Silverberg, Robert. **Kingdoms of the Wall.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21107-1, 348pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1992.) 12th July 1993.

Simmons, Dan. **The Hollow Man.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3814-6, 376pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1992; reviewed by Mary Gentle in *Interzone* 64.) 8th July 1993.

Stith, John E. **Manhattan Transfer.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85285-7, 381pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received.) July 1993.

Swithin, Antony. **The Nine Gods of Safaddne: The Perilous Quest for Lyonesse, Book Four.** Fontana, ISBN 0-00-617855-3, 270pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1993; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 71.) 28th June 1993.

Tepper, Sheri S. **A Plague of Angels.** Bantam/Spectra, ISBN 0-553-09513-7, 423pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received.) 15th October 1993.

Varley, John. **Steel Beach.** HarperCollins, ISBN 0-586-21735-5, 480pp, trade paperback, £8.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1992; the hero is a reporter on the moon named "Hildy Johnson"; the book seems to be laced with similar literary, cinematic and sf-nal in-jokes.) 5th July 1993.

Vinge, Vernor. **A Fire Upon the Deep.** Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-127-8, 579pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1992; reviewed [glowingly] by John Clute in *Interzone* 58.) 8th July 1993.

Warrington, Freda. **Sorrow's Light.** Pan, ISBN 0-330-32664-3, 257pp, trade paperback, £8.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) 2nd July 1993.

Warrington, Freda. **A Taste of Blood Wine.** Pan, ISBN 0-330-32846-8, 581pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror/fantasy novel, first published in 1992.) 2nd July 1993.

Weis, Margaret, and Tracy Hickman. **Serpent Mage: The Death Gate Cycle, Volume 4.** Bantam, ISBN 0-553-40376-1, 436pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1992.) 22nd July 1993.

Zelazny, Roger. **Prince of Chaos.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-128-7, 241pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1991; tenth in the "Amber" series; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 55.) 24th June 1993.

Novelizations, Spinoffs, Sequels by Other Hands, Shared Worlds, Sharecrops

The following is a list of all books received which fall into the above sub-types of sf, fantasy and horror (including non-fiction about shared worlds, etc). For some definitions of terminology, see David Pringle's "Of Sequels and Prequels – and Sequels by Other Hands" in *MILLION* no. 9; and watch out for our forthcoming feature on movie novelizations.

Bulis, Christopher. **Shadowmind.** "The New Doctor Who Adventures." Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20394-1, 244pp, paperback, £4.50. (Sf television-series spinoff novel, first edition.) 15th July 1993.

Chunovic, Louis. **The Quantum Leap Book.** "Based on the Universal Television series *Quantum Leap* created by Donald P. Belisario." Bantam, ISBN 1-85283-866-3, 160pp, trade paperback, £12.99. (Sf television-series concordance and illustrated companion, first published in the USA, 1993.) 24th June 1993.

Dicks, Terrance. **Doctor Who and the Time Warrior.** "Number 65 in the Doctor Who Library." W.H. Allen/Target, ISBN 0-426-20023-3, 144pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf television-series novelization, first published in 1978; based on the BBC TV serial by Robert Holmes first broadcast in 1974; the publishers [owned by Virgin] have been reissuing these slim novelizations from the 1970s and 80s [many of them by Terrance Dicks] at the rate of two a month; "8 million copies sold" of Target Doctor Who novelizations, we're told on the back cover.) 17th June 1993.

Gerrold, David. **The Galactic Whirlpool.** "Star Trek Adventures, 1." Titan, ISBN 1-85286-486-9, ix+223pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf television-and-film-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1980 [a fact which Titan Books endeavour to hide].) 15th July 1993.

Jones, Langdon, and Moorcock, Michael, eds. **The New Nature of the Catastrophe.** "The Tale of the Eternal Champion, Vol. 9." Orion/Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-039-5, 436pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Shared-character sf anthology, first edition in this form; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition priced at £10.99; an earlier, much smaller, edition was entitled *The Nature of the Catastrophe* [1971]; as well as most of the contents of that old volume [stories by Brian Aldiss, M. John Harrison, James Salis, Norman Spinrad, etc], this new book contains all the pieces from Moorcock's *The Lives and Times of Jerry Cornelius* [1976] plus his story "The Murderer's Song" [1987] and others, and some material by other hands, including a story by Simon Ings [from David Garnett's anthology *New Worlds* 2, 1992] and a new piece from the long-silent Langdon Jones; critic John Clute is in here too, with his brilliant essay on Jerry Cornelius which first appeared as the introduction to the US edition of *The Cornelius Chronicles* [1977]; there are also copious illustrations by the late Mal Dean and others, and a useful bibliographical article by John Davey; although Michael Moorcock is presented as "author" on the spine, Langdon Jones is given as primary editor on the title page.) 8th July 1993.

Jones, Neil, and David Pringle, eds. **Deathwing.** "Warhammer 40,000." Bantam, ISBN 1-85283-838-8, 243pp, paperback, £3.99. (Shared-universe role-playing-game-inspired sf anthology, first published in 1990; reviewed by Peter Garratt in *Inter-*

zone 45; despite Neil Jones being credited on the title page as the primary editor, his name is not printed on cover or spine [although his co-editor's is].) 8th July 1993.

McIntee, David A. **White Darkness.** "The New Doctor Who Adventures." Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20395-X, 244pp, paperback, £4.50. (Sf television-series spinoff novel, first edition.) 17th June 1993.

Norton, Andre. **The Mark of the Cat.** "Inspired by the work of Karen Kuykendall." Legend, ISBN 0-09-998170-X, 248pp, paperback, £4.99. (Spinoff fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1992; it's based on "The Outer Regions," a fantasy world invented by Kuykendall, who is a painter and designer of Tarot cards.) 17th June 1993.

Oram, John. **The Copenhagen Affair.** "The Man From U.N.C.L.E." Bantam, ISBN 1-85283-887-6, 127pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf/thriller television-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1965; third in the series; "John Oram" is a pseudonym of Jack Thomas.) 15th July 1993.

Oram, John. **The Stone-Cold Dead in the Market Affair.** "The Man From U.N.C.L.E." Bantam, ISBN 1-85283-857-4, 127pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf/thriller television-series spinoff novel, first published in the UK, 1966; 22nd in the series [according to *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*]; why Bantam have published numbers one, two and three and then leapt straight to the 22nd novel is a minor mystery; no doubt it has to do with the different order of first publication of some titles by Souvenir Press in Britain [the *Encyclopedia* gives us the American, Ace Books ordering].) 15th July 1993.

Peel, John. **Doctor Who: The Power of the Daleks.** "Number 154 in the Target Doctor Who Library." Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20390-9, 253pp, paperback, £4.50. (Sf television-series novelization, first edition; based on the BBC TV serial by David Whitaker first broadcast in 1966; there's a two-page afterword by the author, but he doesn't explain why this rather old "Doctor Who" adventure has not been novelized until now.) 15th July 1993.

Platt, Marc. **Ghost Light.** "Doctor Who: The Scripts." Edited by John McElroy. Titan, ISBN 1-85286-477-X, 135pp, paperback, £4.99. (Juvenile sf television script, first edition; first broadcast in 1989.) 15th July 1993.

Rewolinski, Leah. **Star Wreck: The Generation Gap.** Illustrated by Harry Trumbore. "The spacy spoof that dares to boldly go where nobody wanted to go before." Bantam, ISBN 1-85283-814-0, 107pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf television-series parody, first published in the USA, 1989.) 24th June 1993.

Rewolinski, Leah. **Star Wreck II: The Attack of the Jargonites.** Illustrated by Harry Trumbore. "An unauthorised parody." Bantam, ISBN 1-85283-824-8, 118pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf television-series parody, first published in the USA, 1992; further adventures of Captain James T. Smirk and Mr Smock aboard the starship *Endocrine*.) 24th June 1993.

Strasser, Todd. **Super Mario Brothers.** "Based on the screenplay written by Parker Bennett & Terry Runte and Ed Solomon" [the subtle placing of "ands" and ampersands seems to indicate pecking-order among Hollywood scriptwriters these days]. Penguin/Fantail, ISBN 0-14-090037-3, 119pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy movie novelization, first published in the USA, 1993; illustrated with eight pages of film stills.) 24th June 1993.

Yeovil, Jack. **Genevieve Undead.** "Warhammer." Bantam, ISBN 1-85283-819-1, 257pp, paperback, £3.99. (Shared-universe role-playing-game-inspired fantasy novel, first edition; a sequel to the same author's *Drachenfels and Beasts in Velvet*, it consists of three linked novellas, "Stage Blood," "The Cold Stark House" and "Uncorn Ivory"; this title had been due to be published by GW Books in 1991, but was delayed until now; "Jack Yeovil" is a pseudonym of Kim Newman; highly recommended, the book contains some of Kim's funniest and most imaginative writing.) 8th July 1993.

Books About Popular Fiction

March-June 1993

The following is a continuation of the list of books received – critical, biographical and bibliographical, concerning fiction outside the sf and fantasy genres – which used to appear in *MILLION* magazine. Now that the two magazines have combined we do not intend to run such a listing in every issue, but one may continue to appear here from time to time.

Barer, Burl. **The Saint: A Complete History in Print, Radio, Film and Television of Leslie Charteris's Robin Hood of Modern Crime, Simon Templar, 1928-1992.** McFarland [Box 611, Jefferson, NC 28640, USA], ISBN 0-89950-723-9, xii+419pp, hardcover, \$55 [plus \$4 for overseas shipping]. (Literary-and-media "biography" of a famous fictional character, first edition; this beautifully produced illustrated volume is likely to be of great interest to anyone who ever read and enjoyed the Saint books in their youth; it was poorly timed, however, as it came out just before Leslie Charteris's death at the age of 85 a few months ago; already new bibliographical information is emerging [e.g. the assertion in a *Locus* obituary that sf author Theodore Sturgeon actually ghosted some of the Saint stories of the 1950s] and such posthumous information is not reflected here; this book is a likeable and very respectful work, but a definitive Charteris/Saint bibliography has still to be compiled [likewise a definitive Sturgeon bibliography!].) Late entry: February publication, received in June 1993.

Cadogan, Mary. **The Woman Behind William: A Life of Richmal Crompton.** Macmillan London, ISBN 0-333-60038-X, xviii+169pp, trade paperback, £9.99. (Biography of the famous children's author, first published in 1986; this edition has been slightly revised and updated.) 23rd June 1993.

Marnham, Patrick. **The Man Who Wasn't Maigret: A Portrait of Georges Simenon.** Penguin, ISBN 0-14-013927-3, xviii+346pp, £7.99. (Biography of the celebrated Belgian crime writer, first published in 1992; it comes with praise from Julian Barnes, P.D. James, Muriel Spark and other worthies.) No date shown: June 1993?

Thomas, Donald. **The Marquis de Sade.** Black Swan, ISBN 0-552-99499-5, xii+326pp, paperback, £6.99. (Biography of the most infamous of pornographic writers, first published in 1992.) 22nd April 1993.

Lewis Carroll's Alice Books

Continued from page 58

which the Reverend Dodgson sought to build a bridge into a Heavenly realm which he and Alice could innocently and delightedly share was a perilously fragile structure, and the Wonderland into which it led was not really what it appeared to be. Although it was the most fantastic realm imaginable by one of the most ingenious minds of its era, there was, in the end, far too much of the mature in it.

There is no doubt that the Alice books constitute one of the most heroic attempts ever made to get away from the stifling straitjacket of the here and now, but they failed and are all the more interesting because of their failure. That failure is, in fact, a uniquely marvellous example of the dictum that although truth is certainly stranger than fiction, fiction is – according to its fashion – truer.

The moral of Lewis Carroll's determinedly anti-moralistic books is that it matters not how carefully mad adventurers in the further realms of fantasy may be, nor how resolutely blank are the maps which they carry; in the end, the Boojum is always lurking in place of the Snark, and what we confront at the end of the nonsensical quest is reality, rudely stripped of all the comforting illusions of familiarity and cant.

Even with "the proper assistance," you can no more "leave off at seven" than all the king's horses and all the king's men could put Humpty Dumpty together again. Or, as the Dormouse really said – not exactly, but in words much to this effect – only people who live in treacle wells can sensibly refuse to draw anything but treacle.

(Brian Stableford)

Editor's Note: The first 14 of Brian Stableford's essays on "Yesterday's Bestsellers" appeared in *MILLION*, and covered such writers as Rider Haggard, Edgar Rice Burroughs and James Hilton. Number 15, on F. Anstey, appeared in *Interzone* 74. More will follow.

MILLION

Some back-issue highlights:

No.1: James Ellroy interview (Paul McAuley); Kim Newman on gangsters; Stan Nicholls, Brian Stableford, Mark Morris & many others

No.2: Kurt Vonnegut interview (Colin Greenland); Joan Aiken, Sherlock Holmes, P.C. Wren; plus Wendy Bradley, Nick Lowe

No.3: Anne McCaffrey interview; Angus Wells, Fu Manchu; Stableford on Rider Haggard; plus John Christopher, Dave Langford & others

No.4: Ellis Peters interview (Mike Ashley); Andy Sawyer on Virginia Andrews; Stableford on James Hadley Chase; plus Langford, Byrne

No.5: Terry Pratchett, J.G. Ballard, Anne Rice & David Morrell interviews; Stableford on ERB (this is the same as *Interzone* no.51)

No.6: Dorothy Dunnett interview (Lisa Tuttle); Mary Higgins Clark, Thomas Harris; Stableford on Robinson Crusoe's children

No.7: Campbell Armstrong, Hammond Innes & Norman Mailer interviews; Mike Ashley on the *Strand* magazine; Stableford on Hank Janson

No.8: Stephen Gallagher & John Harvey interviews; Sawyer on "slaver" novels; Stableford on Hammett & Chandler; much more

No.9: Geoff Ryman interview (Newman); Doc Savage; historical mysteries; sequels & prequels; Hollywood novels; etc. etc

No.10: Peter Lovesey on Leslie Charteris; Andrew Vachss & Jonathan Kellerman interviews; Elvis Presley; Rex Stout

No.11: Garry Kilworth on animal fantasy; Michael Crichton, James Herbert, Peter Tremayne; Andrews on Richard S. Prather

No.12: S.T. Joshi on Robert Aickman; series characters, Fay Weldon, Robert Graves, Rupert Bear; Langford, Nick Austin & many more

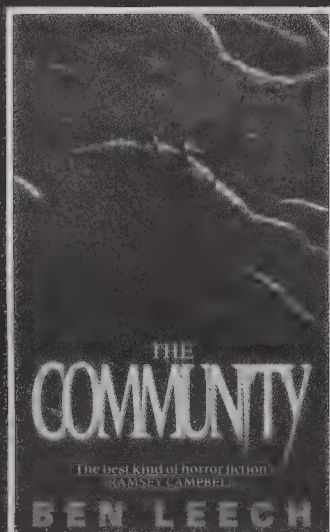
No.13: Clive Barker interview (Nicholls); Newman on Dracula; Joshi on Stephen King; Stableford on *Shangri-La*; Bradbury comics

No.14: Patricia Kennealy interview; Jack the Ripper, John D. MacDonald, Dorothy Sayers; Ian R. MacLeod on Gerald Seymour; & much more

All available from *Interzone* – see page 3.

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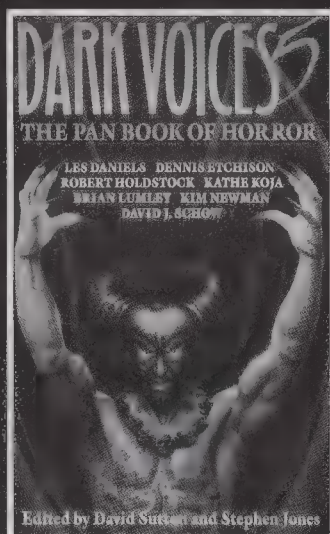


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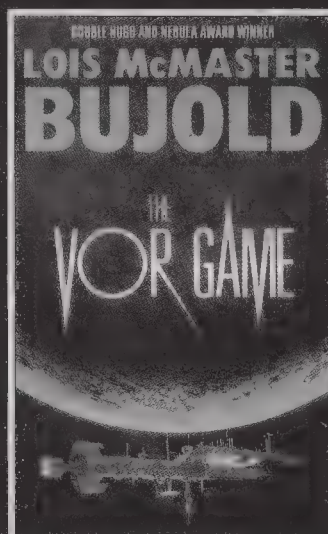
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FANTASYCON XVIII, 1-3 October 1993. Guests of Honour: writers Peter James and Tad Williams, and artist Les Edwards. Master of Ceremonies: Dennis Etchison. Plus many other writers and artists at the Midland Hotel, Birmingham. Attending membership is only £30. For full details send an SAE to Fantasycon, 137 Priory Road, Hall Green, Birmingham B28 0TG.

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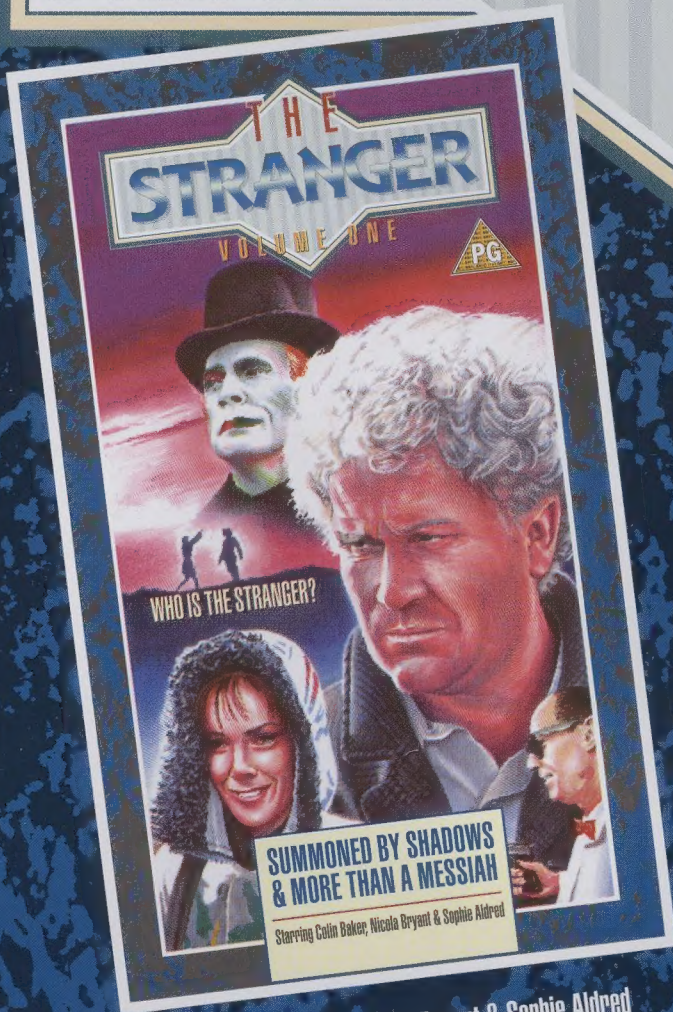
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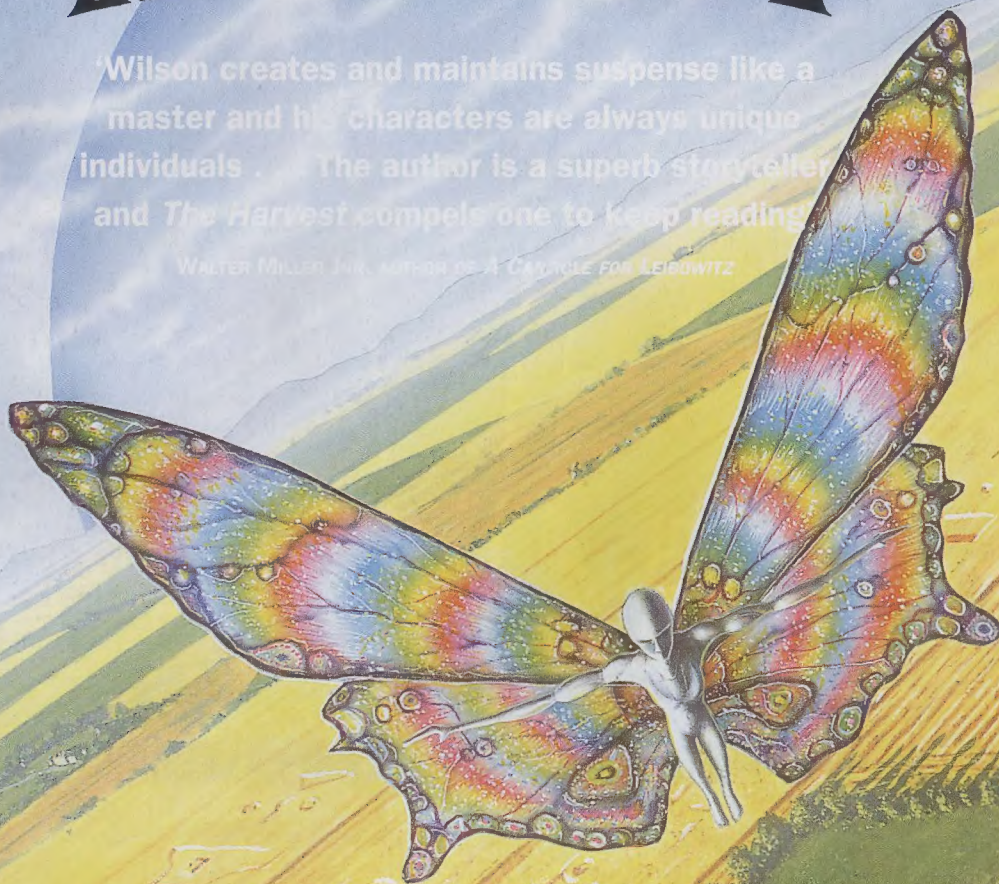
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